

sojourners

A portrait of Niki Wong, a woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored blazer over a black lace top. She is standing outdoors with a building and a wooden railing in the background. The magazine title 'sojourners' is at the top in large orange letters. Below it, the date 'June 2018 | sojo.net' and the tagline 'Faith in Action for Social Justice' are visible. The main headline 'Fighting for the Right to Breathe' is in large white letters. Below it, a sub-headline describes her work against urban fracking. A 'PLUS:' section lists other topics. At the bottom left is a barcode with the number 74678 and a price tag for U.S. and Canada at \$4.95.

June 2018 | sojo.net

Faith in Action for Social Justice

Fighting for the Right to Breathe

Niki Wong leads a community
of resistance to urban fracking
in Los Angeles

PLUS:

Urban Doxology's
soundtrack of
reconciliation

Pastors and police

Sabbath as resistance





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"When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house ..." —ACTS 2

Preaching the Word

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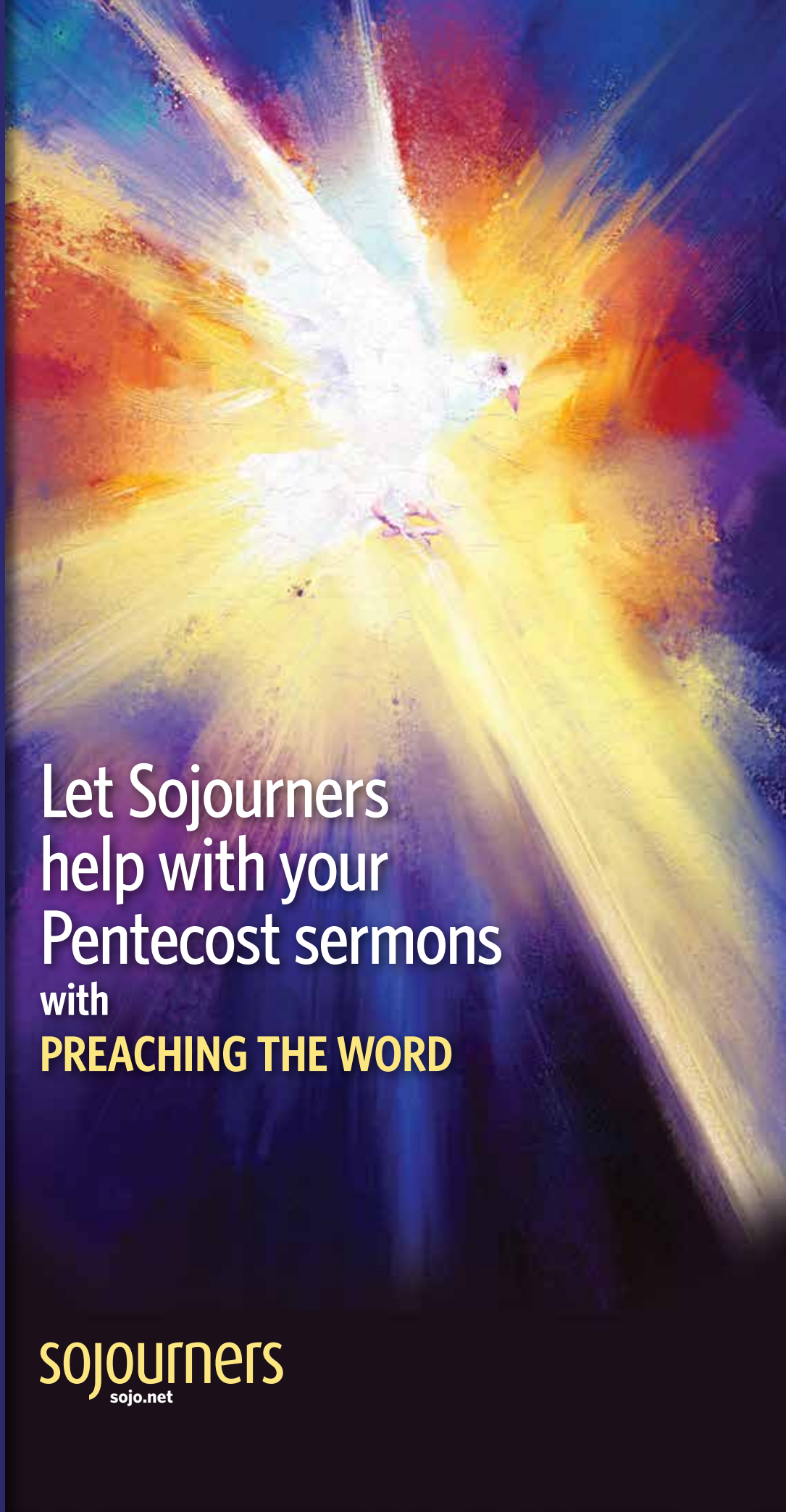
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HERE'S A PARADOX: If justice delayed is justice denied, we cannot rest while anyone suffers; at the same time, we can't work tirelessly for justice without rest. It's the kind of pesky conundrum we face just as we're settling in for a night of sweatpants and Netflix: The prophets in the Bible decried those who sit on fine couches while their neighbors go hungry ... but does that mean it's wrong to re-watch the entire season of *Queer Eye* when we could be doing something more productive?

In this issue, Baptist minister J. Dana Trent uses the fourth commandment ("Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy.") to reframe our quandary. Through this commandment to practice "ritual rest

from our labor," writes Trent, "we opt out of tyranny and opt into care for one another." At its heart, Sabbath rest isn't a pause from justice work; it's a way of disrupting a culture of what Walter Brueggemann describes as "endless desire, endless productivity, and endless restlessness."

Trent also reminds us that "Sabbath as resistance is nearly impossible to practice in isolation." We may not need to surrender our Netflix accounts on the spot, but we should think twice if our binge-watching and constant consumption keeps us from the messy beauty of real community.

And though there's abundant evidence of



how the church has failed to model this beloved community, sometimes church still works. In "Samson's Blessing," Dani Gabriel writes of how her pastor created a new rite—a renaming ceremony—

when Gabriel's son, Samson, came out as transgender. "The support of a church is different from the support of a parent, teacher, or another institution," says Gabriel. "The rite we did for Samson spoke to a love that follows him everywhere, at all times."

Especially now, we cannot afford to abandon the rites and rhythms that sustain us. It may even be time to start some new ones. ■

Letters

Threading a Solid Line

Kelly Brown Douglas' article "How Evangelicals Became White" (April 2018) is fascinating. I have studied colonial American history and American religious history, and it's clear that Douglas threads a solid line through our nation's heritage. In a single article, it's impossible to widen a line that encompasses hundreds of years beyond a well-presented opinion, but it is possible to present a thesis that causes the reader to think, pause, and perhaps look further into the topic. Douglas does this.

Brett Watson
New Castle, Delaware

Don't Forget Oregon

I greatly appreciated Cathy Lynn Grossman's article "Wrestling with the Angel of Death" (April 2018). I have long been a supporter of this end-of-life option. However, Grossman left out an important piece of information. She failed to mention Oregon in the list of states allowing medically assisted suicide. Oregon was one of the first states to adopt this option and did so back in 1994 by ballot. Various groups have tried to get this "death option" repealed, but Oregon reaffirmed its commitment to medically assisted suicide in 1997 with the "Death with Dignity Act." As an Oregonian, I am proud of this state's progressive stance on this highly debated

Thank God Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland are now living together in peace.

issue. As a pastor, I do not hesitate to offer this option to terminally ill patients. We do not have the option to choose life (birth) but, except for war, accident, and violence, we can choose when and how we transition from this life to the next. I believe that grace abounds, even when we choose to drink the hemlock.

Curt McCormack
Keizer, Oregon

Remembering Bloody Sunday

In reading "Out of the Ashes," the inspiring article by Layton E. Williams (March 2018) about reconciliation in Northern Ireland, I found that the history given in the article about the rise of the Troubles missed an event that is essential to understanding what ultimately transpired. I'm thinking of the massacre of peaceful Irish Catholic civil rights demonstrators that became known to the world as Bloody Sunday. On Jan. 30, 1972, British troops fired upon the nonviolent gathering, killing and wounding dozens. This led to the resurgence of the Irish Republican Army and the ensuing violence, pitting factions of the IRA against Protestant Loyalists and

British forces. Thank God Protestants and Catholics are putting this behind them to live together in peace.

Henry Platsky
New York, New York

Rural America's Disaster

Thank you for "A Wound That Still Bleeds" (by Danny Duncan Collum, March 2018) that expresses so well the disaster rural America has endured. My husband and I could hardly believe the many abandoned homestead and dying towns that we saw as we traveled through the upper Midwest in the 1980s. It is sad and unbelievable to us who grew up there and difficult to explain to friends in urban areas who are unfamiliar with the way it once looked. I appreciate that Duncan Collum sheds light on this complex ongoing situation and emphasizes its human dimension.

Claride Mayo
Alexandria, Virginia

I can't believe ...! Write to letters@sojo.net or Letters, Sojourners, 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Include your name, city, and state. Letters may be edited.

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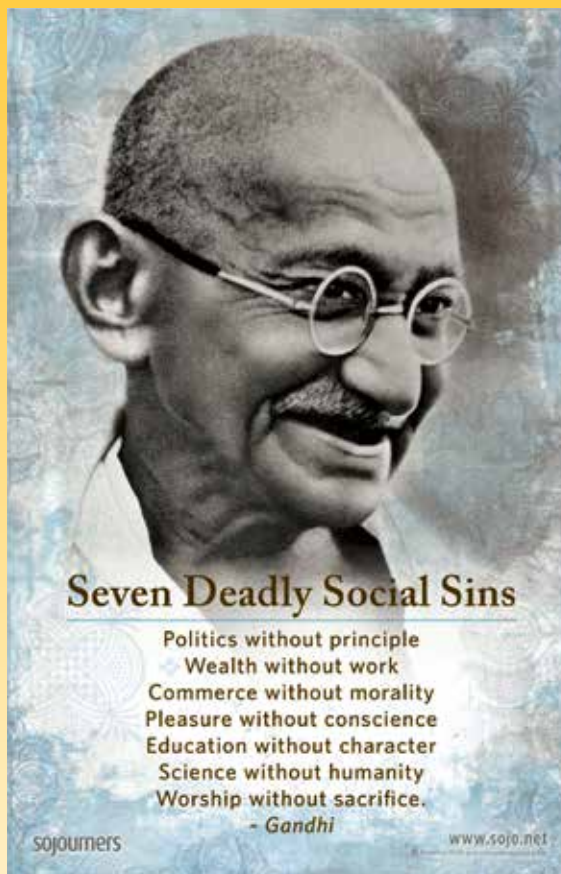
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Sojourners magazine (ISSN 0364-2097) is published monthly, except September-October is combined, at 408 C Street NE, Washington, DC 20002. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Canadian Publications Sales Agreement #257494. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sojourners, PO Box 48, Congers, NY 10920-9856.

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BY JIM WALLIS

Which Jesus Do We Serve?



ON MAY 20, Christians around the world celebrate Pentecost, which commemorates the coming of the Holy Spirit to the earliest followers of Jesus on the 50th day following his resurrection on Easter Sunday. When I read Acts 2 and imagine the room filled with the small band of believers, a sound “like the rush of a violent wind” and tongues “as of fire” resting above each of their heads, my faith is excited, too.

While there were only 120 gathered in that room, 3,000 were added to their number that day. The power of Jesus, the identity of being a follower of Jesus Christ, and the catalyst of the Holy Spirit is such that in the years since, a tiny group of believers in 33 C.E. has blossomed to 2.2 billion who claim Jesus as Lord today.

Yet there have been times in the long history of Christianity when

People claiming the mantle of Christianity have committed terrible atrocities in the name of their faith.

significant numbers of believers have gone astray, having lost the priorities of Jesus. Indeed, in some such times (the Crusades, the Inquisition, the colonization of Africa and the Americas, slavery, Jim Crow, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust all painfully come to mind), people claiming the mantle of Christianity have committed terrible atrocities in the name of their faith.

To bring errant followers of Jesus back to him and his teachings has often required the leadership of prophetic voices able and willing to remind the people of God who they really are. Christianity in the United States is now going through such a time, when racial and national idolatries have captivated



Christians—white American Christians—who have lost their way. For captive Christians to find their way back to being “followers of Jesus” has become the critical call of our time.

TO THAT END, on Ash Wednesday a group of church leaders, all old enough to be called “elders,” met in a private retreat. We experienced a deep sense of lament for the political and moral crisis we are in and for the ways it has unfolded. We confessed on behalf of the churches and for our own complicity in the situation in which we now find ourselves. And we strongly sensed the need for repentance, realizing that word means much more than guilt and shame, but a “turning around” and moving in a new direction.

We agreed to write a declaration together—something that would be much more than just another statement to sign and then file away. Rather, with a shared humble spirit, we felt called to act as elders for a time such as this and to commend our message to the churches for a process of prayer, study, reflection, and action.

Throughout the season of Lent, we offered to God our prayer, confession, and collaborative work. Just before Palm Sunday, we unveiled our public declaration, titled “Reclaiming Jesus.”

The heart of the declaration focuses on this question: Which

Jesus do we serve? Not one that is silent, nor one that is white, nor one that is an American first.

Rather, the Jesus we serve and will obey offers a powerful alternative to the moral crisis that exists at the highest levels of political leadership in this country and to its bitter fruits of racial bigotry and white nationalism, the mistreatment of women, the rejection of immigrants and refugees, the abandonment of the poor, the denial of truth, and the dangerous replacement of public service with autocracy. We believe these issues are not just political problems but pose pressing dangers to authentic Christian faith.

During this Easter season we have engaged with the online readership of Sojourners, the heads of church denominations, and Jesus followers everywhere in a process of civil discourse and discernment around this declaration and what it means for Christians in the United States. We know that this confession of faith must lead to concrete action, and we plan to officially launch a season of actions to reclaim the ways of Jesus—starting on Pentecost, which is when early Christians first took their faith to the streets. Going public with our faith is now demanded of us.

Let no one tell you that what our country is going through in this political era is normal, or business as usual, or that Christians are behaving as they have always behaved. The future of the nation’s soul and the integrity of faith are both at stake in how Christians respond to this political moment. Even now, it is not too late to repent and choose a more faithful future. Let us pray that Pentecost marks a decisive moment in the journey back to Jesus. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine. Read the declaration at ReclaimingJesus.org.



Women from more than 40 South Sudanese organizations march through the capital city, Juba, in 2017.

Stefanie Glinski/AFP Photo

By Phil Wilmot

Women Choosing Peace

Christians in South Sudan opt for nonviolent resistance to government oppression.

SOUTH SUDAN is the world's youngest and most fragile state. The outbreak of civil war in 2013 pushed millions out of the country and into refugee camps. Oil revenues fuel President Salva Kiir's regime, notorious for kidnapping and torturing those who criticize him.

Kiir's suppression hasn't stopped courageous Christian women from taking their prayers for peace to the streets. On the first Saturday of every month, hundreds of women gather to demand an end to war.

"All 64 tribes are represented in the women's division of the South Sudan Council of Churches," said Maria Bol (not her real name), a member of the ecumenical body responsible for organizing the marches. "The challenge in South Sudan is that the government has no tear gas. They just use live bullets against peaceful protesters. But our actions

often go on uninterrupted, since they know we are peaceful and prayerful."

Although the international media portrays South Sudan's women and youth as passive victims of their tragic circumstances,

Every first Saturday, hundreds of women gather to demand an end to war.

it is exactly these demographics that are pushing back against this brutal regime. In November, youth members of more than 40 women's organizations convened the largest anti-war demonstration since the war began. Thousands turned up, wielding messages of peace while Kiir's national security forces—responsible for intimidating and abusing his critics—attempted to single out leaders.

These leaders continue to suffer—some even being intimidated in the neighboring

countries to which they fled—and threats continue against their family members back home.

"This militancy is born of Sudanese rule, of our former colonial masters," said Juba-based conflict resolution analyst Fareed Musa Fataki. "There is a school of thought that powerful men are not subjected to any rules. Thus, South Sudan has no clear distinction between politics and militarism."

The recent normalization of militarism—guns wielded by those in civilian attire, kidnappings of peace activists beyond South Sudan's borders, road checkpoints throughout the supposedly secure capital city of Juba, rampant disappearances, and use of secret detention sites—may be the reason why many South Sudanese choose peaceful over violent resistance.

Our Mission

The mission of *Sojourners* magazine is to inspire hope and action by articulating the biblical call to racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship.

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All other air service overseas (one to two weeks delivery): \$59.95 one year. Except where noted, payable in U.S. currency.

Newsstand Circulation

Newsstand circulation through Disticor Magazine Distribution Services. For more information, call (905) 619-6565, fax (905) 619-2903, or email mraucci@disticor.com.

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Printed in the U.S.A. on recycled paper.



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South Sudan is a nation born into peace. Broad nonviolent campaigns (including those prompted by the 2002 South Sudan Council of Churches document "Let My People Choose") led to a national referendum across the 10 original states that birthed a new nation into existence, with about 99 percent voting for self-determination.

The people of South Sudan have never tolerated their descent into war. Since the first shots were fired, Christian women have marched and preached against violence in marketplaces and police stations. Artists have flooded the streets with symbols of peace. Children in peace clubs have shouted songs against bloodshed. Peacemaking trainings have undermined the efforts of politicians to recruit and arm youth. Activists have carried dead bodies to parliament. The South Sudanese have been anything but passive.

By Denise Giardina

Victory!

West Virginia teachers win a 5 percent raise for all state employees.

WEST VIRGINIA'S schoolteachers went on strike on Feb. 22. Although West Virginia has a proud labor history, the state's two teacher unions (West Virginia Education Association and American Federation of Teachers-West Virginia) do not have the right to strike. After decades of labor movements failing nationally, the Trump age has not seemed like a prime moment for a revival. And West Virginia's government is firmly in the hands of Republicans.

Fast-forward to March 7. Schools reopened after a statewide strike that lasted two weeks. Teachers procured a 5 percent raise, not only for themselves but for *all* state employees, from state police to highway maintenance workers to clerks at the DMV.

When schools reopened, the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* interviewed a woman dropping off her grandchildren at Horace Mann Middle School. She said the children wanted to support their teachers, who every day stood in the cold outside their school. "Every time we'd pass by the teachers

The South Sudan Council of Churches' 2017 action plan for peace invites people of Christian faith across the globe to join their advocacy for a comprehensive peace agreement. "We call upon the church in the United States to join us in nonviolent advocacy to stop the war," said Bol.

Yet the ecumenical thrust for peace in South Sudan isn't idly waiting for international solidarity. Christians standing up to militarism have chosen the path of Jesus—speaking truth to power despite the risks. In the words of one female youth activist, "Nonviolence is the way we choose to live. We all have power. Nonviolence is the choice to use it." ■

Phil Wilmot, with Suzan Abong Wilmot, is co-founder of Solidarity Uganda. He lives in Lira, Uganda.

[picketing] outside, they'd say, 'Blow it, Nana. Blow the horn.'"

Nana wasn't the only one blowing her horn. Or dropping off boxes of donuts and pizza for pickets. Most West Virginians have family members or friends who are teachers or are state employees. When teachers went out, other school workers—janitors, cooks, bus drivers—stayed out as well. People know that teachers are underpaid and often work second jobs, and that many other state employees qualify for food stamps.

The strategy of the Republican governor and legislature was to divide and conquer. They tried to entice teachers to look out for their own pay raise (of 1 percent) and ignore other state workers. They tried to play on

the frustration of parents who were forced to scramble for childcare or who could not afford to substitute for the free meals their children receive at school. But the community stepped in. Churches and civic organizations provided meals and childcare.

The legislature was

The energy is spreading to other places where teachers are devalued and disrespected.

From the Archives

June-July 1974

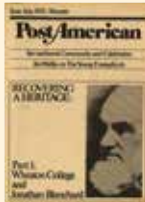
The Jubilee Year

"HE HAS anointed me to ... proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19). A growing number of biblical scholars believe that "the acceptable year of the Lord" likely refers to the jubilee year of Leviticus 25. For this year there is promised a remission of debts, the liberation of slaves, the making fallow the soil, and the return to each individual of their family's property. For rabbinic Judaism and his other listeners, Jesus was linking his coming with the time when all inequities would be righted, a time of social and economic restructuring.

[John Howard] Yoder suggests that texts such as "Do not be anxious" may be given in the context of the fallow year and that the prayer "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" should be interpreted far more literally than has usually been the case in praying our Lord's prayer. "Sell what you possess and put in practice compassion" may not so much be a counsel of perfection as a jubilee ordinance that was to be put into practice here and now. ...

There are many other indications of the political nature of Jesus' ministry. His intimate associates were political. As many as one-half of the disciples ... were zealots, members of the political revolutionary party of Judaism. ... Though he was traded for an insurrectionist, the charge against Jesus was likewise political, charging him with aspiring to be king of the Jews. ■

Dale W. Brown was professor of theology at Bethany Seminary and a Sojourners contributing editor when this article appeared.



intransigent and union leaders got cold feet. The union asked teachers to go back to work, and forget pay raises for other state workers. But the teachers, cooks, and bus drivers carried on. Attorney General Patrick Morrissey called the strike unlawful. But county boards of education refused to order their teachers back to work. Not a single county broke the unified stand, so the point became moot. The governor and legislators caved, and state workers across the board received a 5 percent raise. A commission has been established to address problems with public employee health care.

My sister-in-law Cindy, who teaches special education, was one of those on the picket line and at the state capitol. She is a devout Christian with no previous political involvement other than to vote. Her experience was eye-opening, and moving. Watching legislators in chaotic action, she said, "I felt like I was sitting in a middle-school classroom."

But that was balanced by encounters with the public employees the teachers refused to leave behind, who showed "such gratitude." She spoke of how the experience drew her colleagues together. She concluded, "I was blessed with all the public support. I believe that was what kept us so encouraged and motivated to stay the course."

Observing the strike, I glimpsed those reign-of-God moments—the selflessness, the unity and community, the courage. And in the meantime, the energy is spreading to other places where teachers are devalued and disrespected. Kentucky teachers this spring are protesting a Republican governor intent on wrecking their pension plan. At a rally at the capital in Frankfort, a teacher held a sign that read, "Don't make us go all WV on you." ■

Denise Giardina is a novelist who lives in Charleston, W.Va.

By Susan K. Taylor

Capital Improvement

Even global banks are catching on: B Corps are good business.

MOST PEOPLE RESPOND to incentives. A lower price. A deadline. Chocolate pudding after you eat your vegetables.

Big companies respond to incentives, too, such as tax breaks or lower costs of inputs.

Remarkably, Danone Corp. has created its own incentives to step up its positive-impact game by getting lenders to agree to lower the price of money Danone borrows if it meets a range of socially beneficial goals. And, even more remarkably, in February, 12 global banks agreed.

Based in France, Danone makes and sells Dannon yogurt and other dairy products, infant and medical nutrition, and bottled water—a \$2-billion-dollar industry. Any seller of bottled water and infant formula has and deserves critics, and although the company has far to go in serving the social good, it has come a long way. Danone focuses on environmentally sound sourcing, packaging development, and recycling, as well as employee well-being. Several of its subsidiaries are B Corporations, meaning they

annually pass an independent, in-depth evaluation of how well they serve *all* stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and watersheds—not just shareholders, the only constituency that drives most businesses.

According to the lending deal, as reported in *Forbes*, Danone's cost of capital will rise or fall with the percentage of its sales from B-Corp subsidiaries. Doing more business with all stakeholders in mind will result in cheaper loans to meet operating expenses and to invest in new business. In addition, Danone's environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance will be evaluated by other third-party monitors. A greenwashed annual report will not suffice. "This may be the first time a company's cost of capital has been explicitly tied to its third-party-verified ESG performance," reports *Forbes*.

Why is this beyond noteworthy? When financial incentives are aligned with social and environmental progress, there is hope for significant change simply due to scale.

Advocates for ESG management have been saying for decades that corporations

perform better when they conduct business with transparency, hire and retain talent without bias, treat employees well, mitigate environmental impact, and use resources responsibly. And they do so with less risk of expensive litigation, regulatory penalties, and public ire.

The Danone deal signals that even the global banks are catching up and catching on—and quantifying the lower-risk and higher-performance expectations with money, the ultimate business incentive.

This is not just one capital deal for one company. And it's not limited to the socially responsible investment industry. This is a business trend so obvious that even main-

Doing more business with all stakeholders in mind will result in cheaper loans.

stream publication *Fortune* wrote that “smart leaders should turn B-Corp guidelines into a checklist to drive their business.”

B Lab, the nonprofit organization that certifies B Corps, reports there are 2,100 B Corps from 50 countries and more than 130 industries. If B Corps get cheaper loans, we can expect to see many more.

The world's largest investment manager, BlackRock, has openly stated that it sees the greatest value (i.e. it expects to invest) in companies that conduct business with a larger social purpose and contribution. Giant brokerage houses such as Merrill Lynch and Fidelity have launched impact-investing platforms to appeal to investors looking for socially screened and environmentally sustainable portfolios.

Whether from a genuine sense of contribution (as I trust motivates B Corps) or opportunistically following the money (as I suspect motivates the large brokerage houses), to have more money and power working for the good of our communities and our planet is good news and will benefit us all. ■

Susan K. Taylor is co-owner of Just Money Advisors Inc., an investment management firm in Louisville, Ky., that specializes in socially responsible and community investing.



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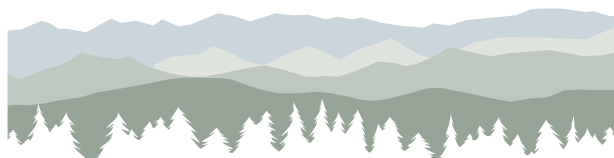
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IMMIGRATION



Rev. Reuben Eckels of Church World Service washes the feet of Beni Dedieu Lazau, a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo, in front of the White House.

Bekah Fulton

A Place Where Everyone is Welcomed

On the eve of Maundy Thursday, clergy from the Interfaith Immigration Coalition gathered to wash the feet of refugees in front of the White House. Members of different faith traditions celebrated a shared commitment to hospitality and called on the U.S. to fulfill its commitment to resettle 45,000 refugees during the current fiscal year. As of March 31, the midpoint of the fiscal year, the U.S. had resettled less than a quarter of that goal. For ongoing coverage of immigration, visit sojo.net.

VIEWS

3 Christian Myths About Transgender People

'As a transgender person, one of the biggest myths I see in the media today is that transgender people live sad, dangerous, and lonely lives," writes Austen Hartke on sojo.net. Here are three of the myths he sees most often in Christian communities—and how to correct them.

Myth #1: Transgender people experience "a war between the body and the mind," which leads to their belief that bodies are unimportant. The truth? Transgender people are not moving toward a separation of body and mind—they're moving away from it, toward wholeness.

Myth #2: Gender dysphoria—a dissonance between who others say you are and who you know yourself to be—is corrected by convincing people to affirm their sex assigned at birth. This myth is often used to support "conversion" therapy—which doesn't work. Instead, we know that socially and medically transitioning does alleviate dysphoria and lead to better mental health outcomes for transgender people.

Myth #3: Transgender people don't love their bodies. As Christians, we are called to recognize that our bodies are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), but just because your body is good doesn't mean that it can't change. It can be hard to distinguish between the things we need to change about ourselves and the things we need to learn to accept. But one of the best ways of discerning between the two is to look at whether harm is possible if we leave something alone.

Read more at sojo.net/myths.

QUOTED

"I do not need to add an exclamation point to every sentence in order to make sure that my demeanor seems positive and magnetic."

—Whitney Parnell
on refusing to accept being treated like a little girl
sojo.net/parnell



Associated Press

Paying Attention to the Wake-Up Call

IN JUNE 1964, 54 years ago this month, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael “Mickey” Schwerner were asked by leaders of the Congress of Racial Equality to investigate the burning of a black church that had doubled as a Freedom School in Neshoba County, Miss.

More than 1,000 people, including college students, boarded buses bound for Mississippi that year. Over the preceding four years, these young people had witnessed a Southern sea change, from school desegregation to the integra-

courses at Ole Miss. Mississippians lost their minds. The ensuing riot required 31,000 National Guards to quell it and left two dead and hundreds wounded. Meredith *did* register—and was graduated—but Medgar Evers, field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi, was assassinated the following year, in his driveway.

One year after Evers fell, Freedom Summer upped the ante. Mississippi civil rights workers declared it was time to bring freedom to all people of African descent in the state that had exonerated the bragging murderers of Emmett Till.

White and black, thousands of students from across the country signed

up for Freedom Summer. They joined the Council of Federated Organizations and their member organization, the Congress of Racial Equality, in a massive voter registration effort throughout the state. It was during Freedom Summer that Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney rode to Meridian, Miss., to their deaths.

Assassinated by members of the sheriff’s department, Philadelphia, Miss. police officers, and members of the Klan, the three men were buried in an earthen dam and found

two months later, along with numerous other bodies. The concentrated effort of the FBI and 200 sailors from a nearby naval air station assisting in the search ripped the sheet off the depravation that had been allowed to thrive in Mississippi until then.

The movement for black freedom in the U.S. was not nonviolent. It was war, a clear continuation of the Civil War. In each city and town, the civil rights leadership chose a battleground. It was a war fought on one side with bombs, dogs, terror-washed rope and trees, rivers and dams. The other side fought with the weapons of nonviolent resistance. They wielded soul force, bodily presence, resolve, waves of foot soldiers ready to take the last one’s place, and faith. Faith was at their core.

We rarely engage with that level of resolve today. We understand marching and getting arrested to change policy. But I don’t think we understand that we are still in this war. Perhaps the revelations of Charlottesville and promises of Southern border walls and talk of “s***hole nations” and threats to after-school programs and public-school education are our wake-up call. ■

Lisa Sharon Harper, author of The Very Good Gospel, is founder and president of FreedomRoad.us.



The movement for black freedom was war, a clear continuation of the Civil War.

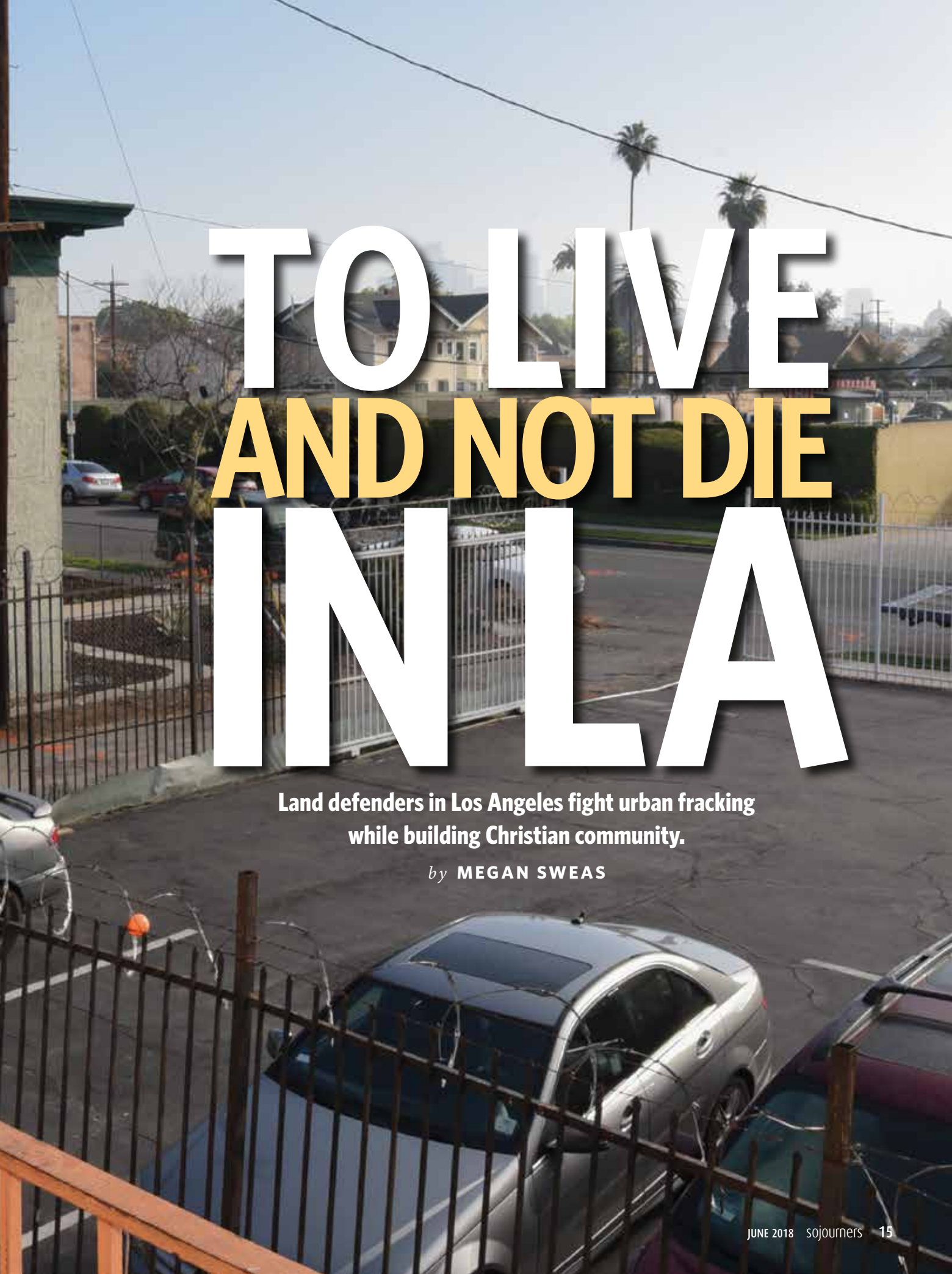
tion of lunch counters, buses, bus depots, and movie theaters. They witnessed the Children’s March in Birmingham—hoses, dogs, terror faced down by black children who did not run. They stood their ground and they filled jails and they sang about overcoming. These previously silenced and subjugated people were now using the only thing they had—their bodies—to break through. And they had broken through.

Nashville, Greenville, Montgomery, Birmingham ... Now, it was Mississippi’s turn. James Meredith had served as the tip of the spear in 1962 when he registered for



Neighborhood activist Niki Wong stands across the street from an active drill site surrounded by an 11-foot-high yellow wall—the only thing separating the site’s carcinogenic chemicals from the more than 30,000 people who live within a mile.

Photo by Lauren Whaley



TO LIVE AND NOT DIE IN LA

Land defenders in Los Angeles fight urban fracking
while building Christian community.

by MEGAN SWEAS

“The desire and need for fossil fuels is creating sacrifice zones, and my neighborhood is one of them.” —Niki Wong

The families showed up early for the South Los Angeles planning commission meeting in late January. Parents stood in the back, soothing crying babies. A young girl leaned over a chair, coloring in a house with bright pink solar panels on a purple roof. “Clean energy can come from the sun,” her page read.

They showed up in force to oppose an oil company’s appeal to new and revised zoning restrictions on the Jefferson drill site, an oil field in their neighborhood. They lined up to share stories of the nauseating smells, disruptive noises, concerns about the risk of catastrophic explosion, and fears of the drill site’s long-term health impacts on their children.

When Niki Wong approached the microphone, she asked everyone against the oil field to stand. “Tonight families, children, and residents are here to stand for a healthy future,” she said, as nearly all the 70 attendees—except for the five representatives of the oil company—rose behind her.

Wong lives within a half mile of the drill site and walks by it every day. As the lead community organizer with Redeemer Community Partnership, a Christian community development corporation that has been working in South Los Angeles since 1992, she speaks not only for herself but also for her whole community.

Her faith community’s fight against the drill site represents a distinctive approach to ministry, one that introduces Christians to new social issues, including environmental justice. Embedding themselves into the community has allowed Wong and Church of the Redeemer, an Evangelical Covenant Church, to become powerful advocates for change.

At the appeals hearing, when the representatives of Sentinel Peak Resources, which bought the Jefferson drill site in 2017, described themselves as a “good neighbor,” Wong was incredulous. A native of Sugar Land, Texas, Wong is intimately familiar with the energy industry. Both of her parents and many friends work in jobs related to the industry.

When she tells friends about her work, she lays out the facts: The drill site operates in an area with a density of more than 30,000 people per square mile, with nothing but an 11-foot-high wall between the site and the multifamily residences next door. Church of the Redeemer meets in a school a couple of blocks away. Most residents are people of color and living in poverty. They are renters, nearly half holding less than a high school education, and about a quarter do not speak English.

“The desire and need for fossil fuels is creating sacrifice zones, and my neighborhood is one of them,” Wong tells them. “Part of what it means to be a Christian is thinking about these things and making decisions that would be in line with what is just and what takes care of people on the margins.”

Environmental issues are not necessarily Wong’s passion. Rather, it is her faith that drives her interest in the impact of the drill site—and climate change more broadly—on vulnerable people.

Face to face with inequality

Wong first came face to face with inequality on a mission trip in Texas in sixth grade. She continued going on mission trips every year, culminating in nearly three weeks in Kenya and Uganda as a senior in high school. “Coming back to Sugar Land, I was so angry that we had straight sidewalks,” she says of her experience seeing slums in Africa.

But she felt alone in that anger.

In college, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship helped her with her feelings. “It was really comforting to know that part of that anger comes from who God is and what it means to follow Jesus—that Jesus had those same feelings when he saw injustice happening, that he had to do something about it,” Wong says.

On a mission trip to Manila, the Philippines, during college, Wong discovered a different approach to what it meant to “do something.” There, “mission” wasn’t about dropping in, volunteering, and leaving—it was about seeking the holistic transformation of a community.

This introduction to “incarnational” service changed Wong’s course. She switched her major from biochemistry and molecular biology to urban studies. She abandoned her plans for medical school and instead pursued a master’s degree in public health. She wanted to help whole communities rather than just one patient at a time.

Wong and her husband began considering programs that would allow them to tie “your life and your future to the experience of the community,” as she puts it.

This is the model of the Redeemer community.

‘We didn’t know how toxic this was’

Like Wong, Richard Parks grew up in a wealthy suburb. When he first arrived in South Los Angeles as a student at the University of Southern California, he felt uncomfortable with the poverty surrounding the school. He joined InterVarsity and found Jesus’ words to be a compelling guide for his life—until he heard the commandment to “love your neighbor.”

“I thought, ‘Wow, I know who my neighbors are and I don’t love them, and I’m not sure I want to,’” Parks says. “I had to make a decision. Am I going to trust and see that his words are good here as well, or am I going to walk away from everything?”

Jesus’ commandment and the example of the early disciples in Acts inspired Parks and a few friends to move off campus and into the University Park neighborhood. They opened their doors to homeless people, tutored youth, and closed liquor stores. They started both Church of the Redeemer and Redeemer Community Partnerships, of which Parks is president.

And for 20 years, they lived blocks away from the Jefferson drill site.

Then, around 2014, Parks saw a permit application to drill three new wells and operate them 24-7. He and his team went door-to-door to ask neighbors about the drill site and discovered that strong fumes, fires, and oil spraying on homes and cars worried residents.

The city had previously waived public hearings for the drill site, but this time Redeemer Community Partnership and residents showed up to the public hearing, and the permit was denied. “That was just the tip of the iceberg,” Parks says. “At that point, we didn’t really know about how toxic this land-use was and its impact on residents. [We thought] it really was more of a nuisance.”

Wong and her husband first met Parks in spring 2014 while searching for their next ministry site. Parks gave them a neighborhood tour, pointing out the Jefferson drill site. As he shared some of the chemicals he had learned about, “all these alarms went off in my head,” Wong says. With a background in biochemistry, urban studies, and public health, she understood the impact they could have on the people who lived around the site. “I remember leaning over to my husband on the walking tour and saying, ‘If we decide to move here, I’m going to work on this issue with that guy,’” she says. Wong and her husband moved to Los Angeles that summer, and Redeemer Community Partnership hired her as an organizer.

The chemicals next door

Around the same time, Liberty Hill Foundation, a local social justice organization, also turned its attention to urban drilling in Los Angeles. It helped fund individual efforts against

Redeemer Community’s Niki Wong and Richard Parks walk near the Jefferson drill site.

Lauren Whaley

drill sites, including Wong’s position at Redeemer. It also put together STAND-LA (Stand Together Against Neighborhood Drilling-Los Angeles), a coalition of activists fighting the same issues across a variety of neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

According to a 2015 report by Liberty Hill (“Drilling Down”), there were more than 5,000 active oil wells in about 70 drill sites across the County of Los Angeles as of 2014. Oil had built the city of Los Angeles, once the center of the world’s oil production. Today, the LA basin produces 28 million barrels per year, on land as well as offshore.

Production goes up and down with the price of oil, but the easiest oil to extract is gone, according to John Fleming, staff scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity. “Over time, there’s been an increased use of ‘enhanced oil recovery techniques,’” he says.

While the negative impacts of hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” have become well known, lesser-known enhanced techniques, such as acidification and gravel-packing a well, can be just as problematic, Fleming says. According to a report he authored (“Danger Next Door”), oil companies used more than 98 million pounds of toxic air pollutants in Los Angeles County between June 2013 and February 2017 as part of the extraction process. The known air toxics most frequently used by oil companies in the Los Angeles air basin include crystalline silica, methanol, hydrofluoric acid, and formaldehyde—the “trade secret” chemicals are unknown.

“Imagine actually driving those chemicals through neighborhoods,” Fleming says. “There isn’t a way to [drill] without using these chemicals and endangering people in these neighborhoods that are nearby, therefore it shouldn’t be happening.”

Niki Wong, center, and other local leaders defend their neighborhood from the Jefferson drill site.

Redeemer Community Partnership



Redeemer Community activists celebrate a motion by the LA City Council to study whether to prohibit oil and gas activity in neighborhoods.



Redeemer Community Partnership

Little research has been done about the impact of drill sites in Los Angeles or any highly urbanized area. Sentinel Peak Resources representatives call the neighbors' complaints "unsubstantiated."

Wong has put her academic background to use, serving as a community partner on new research projects to fill the gap. A 2018 study in *The International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, to which Wong contributed, found a significantly increased rate of asthma in the area surrounding the Jefferson drill site (which operates 36 wells on less than two acres), compared to the broader neighborhood (20.3 percent vs. 9.8 percent). More than a quarter of the residents surveyed reported that oil-related odors prevented daily activities.

The Redeemer community is particularly concerned with chemicals known to be carcinogens and endocrine-blockers, which can cause birth defects. The local study did not gather enough data about birth outcomes for analysis, but other studies find correlations between proximity to drill sites and low birth weights, birth defects, and reduced health of infants.

The "precautionary principal" in the field of public health suggests change is necessary now, Wong says. "We don't have to wait for concrete connections between this particular chemical causing cancer in this particular neighbor to act."

Wong authored a paper in 2017 summarizing studies on the health impacts of oil production elsewhere in the United States, mostly in rural areas. Due to the correlation between the distance of wells from homes and elevated risk of health effects, those studies recommend setbacks of 1,320 to 8,202 feet from active drill sites. Clearing just 1,500 feet around an oil well in South LA, according to Wong, would require the evacuation of 100,000 people. Currently, the Jefferson oil and waste-well site operates as close as 60 feet from homes, according to residents.

From oil wells to skate parks

STAND-LA is asking the LA City Council for a 2,500-foot setback from any oil well to houses or sensitive land uses. If approved, it would effectively shutter the Jefferson drill site and others in densely populated areas.

"We believe that fundamentally a drill site is not compatible with a residential neighborhood," Wong says. "It never should have been built there."

While STAND-LA works on this bigger goal, "it's hand-to-hand combat in the trenches," says Angela Johnson Meszaros, a lawyer with EarthJustice who works with Redeemer Community Partnership. "You have to do something now."

In 2016, Johnson Meszaros helped Redeemer petition the city to address their complaints. After a hearing, the city's zoning administrators revised and added to the 1960s rules that governed the site. The new rules require a 45-foot-high permanent enclosure, soundproofing, and electric rigs (to

reduce diesel exhaust), measures that are already in place at drill sites in whiter and wealthier West LA neighborhoods.

"There's this clear environmental racism at work," Parks says. The city hasn't always looked out for residents, he and Johnson Meszaros agree, but it is paying attention now.

In January, the city planning commission upheld all the new and revised regulations. "The community speaking here was very telling and impactful on me," commission president Eric Bates said at the meeting, concluding the board's unanimous vote against Sentinel Peak Resources' appeal.

Having a faith community involved in the struggle reminds city leaders of their moral responsibilities, says Maya Golden-Krasner, senior attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity. She noted, however, that Los Angeles' faith community is not a united front on this issue. The nearby AllenCo Energy and Murphy drill sites are on land owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Environmental organizations, residents, and other faith leaders have pointed to Pope Francis' leadership on climate change to push the archdiocese to terminate its leases with oil companies, but have so far been unsuccessful.

Redeemer Community Partnership is the first faith-based organization that Johnson Meszaros has worked with as an environmental advocate. She admires the clarity of purpose and perseverance that their faith gives them—and they will need it. The company is likely to sue, arguing the city is violating its vested interests with the restrictions, Johnson Meszaros says.

Wong says they are in it for the long haul. "Our church is really committed to being part of God's work in this neighborhood to renew and restore it," she says.

Days after the hearing, Wong was back canvassing the community. When she told people the news, everyone said the same thing: "That's great we've got new rules, but when is it going to close?" Someday, Wong hopes to invite them to a different sort of community meeting about the Jefferson drill site—one where *they* get to decide what to do with the site.

"Right now, it is land use that repels people from the neighborhood," she says. "I would love to see the site turn into something that brings the community together."

The kids have already told her what they want: a skate park. ■

Megan Sweas (@msweas) is a freelance journalist based in Los Angeles and editor at USC's Center for Religion and Civil Culture. She is the author of *Putting Education to Work: How Cristo Rey High Schools are Transforming Urban Education*.

Leave It to Beavers

IN THE REMARKABLE speech that God delivers beginning in Job 38—God’s longest soliloquy in the Bible, Old Testament or New—we hear of the mountain goat, the raven, the lioness, even the wonderfully silly ostrich, redeemed by her wild speed. But nothing of the beaver! Doubtless this is because Job, confined to the old world, had not come across *Castor canadensis*, and so God did not want to confuse him (Job was freaked out enough already). But if God had been aiming at a North American audience, there is no doubt the beaver would have starred in the account, because there may be no finer creature under heaven.

These reflections are based on reading the galleys of a new book that will be published this month under the excellent title *Eager*, by Ben Goldfarb. It is the account of the impact, past and perhaps future, of this remarkable rodent. An inhabitant of the northeast mountains, I’ve lived in their company my whole life (and have had the occasional flooded basement to show for it), but as Goldfarb points out, this is a relatively new development. A hundred years ago, they’d been



Beavers are the greatest hydraulic engineers on earth.

Shutterstock

the water level high enough that the entrance to the beaver’s lodge is safely underwater. But the rest are pure public service. To wit:

- Their ponds are havens for every kind of wildlife—in the arid West, the great sanctuaries of biodiversity.
- Their dams hold back rampaging floods, creating a watery maze that prevents massive damage downstream.
- The water thus impounded seeps into the ground, recharging depleted aquifers.

These are not small blessings. On a continent increasingly beset by climate-caused drought and flood, beavers couldn’t be more important. And their effects are not minor: Goldfarb marshals one study after another to prove that they could be decisive in rewatering the arid West—which indeed was far greener back before beavers were trapped out.

The evidence is strong enough that even ranchers—for too long reflexive enemies of almost all wildlife—have begun to experiment with reintroducing beavers. The

wetlands they create in turn produce ton upon metric ton of delicious grass and keep the spreads green even in the driest years. Though state wildlife officials remain wary (and though too many anglers remember the completely untrue Narnian slander that beavers eat fish), the beaver is quickly becoming a crucial tool of landscape restoration.

They were reintroduced to my region a century ago, and now almost every watercourse that can host a beaver family has one; the slap of tail on water is one of the most familiar and happy sounds I know.

“Does the eagle soar at your command and build its nest on high?” God asks Job, who of course must reply that he has no part in such doings. But we—in recompense for our sins—may someday be able to say that we have at least restored the magnificent beaver to its old range across the country. A happy and productive day that would be! ■



Bill McKibben is the *Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College in Vermont and founder of 350.org.*

On a continent increasingly beset by climate-caused drought and flood, beavers couldn’t be more important.

extirpated from the region, trapped out—indeed, the trapping that decimated their population across the country is painful to read about. In a matter of weeks, whole watersheds could be cleaned out, just because of a fashion for beaver hats.

This vanity cost the continent dearly, because beavers are the greatest hydraulic engineers on earth. The dams they build serve many purposes. One is parochial—they raise



'Walk with Me a Minute'

Pastors in a D.C. suburb work to build trust—and accountability—with local police.

by **QUINTIN J. SIMMONS**

EARLY LAST YEAR a Hyattsville, Md. man arrived home to find police cars and crime scene tape on his walkway. He learned that his younger sister had accidentally overdosed, and the coroner had been summoned to rule out foul play. The man wanted to enter the house, view his sister's body, and perhaps say his goodbyes. But the police wouldn't allow him inside.

"I could see when he started walking up the walk that he was unhappy," said Rev. Stephen Price, who police called to the scene. "He and the officer were having a very tense conversation," said Price, pastor of First Baptist Church of Hyattsville.

So Price intervened. "He's mad and the officer is feeling strained," Price later explained. "I said, 'Walk with me a minute.'" The man vented his frustration, but eventually calmed. Price explained what the police needed to do and persuaded the man to stand with his family while police finished their work in the home. In the interim, Price promised to be a go-between for the man and the officers until the body was released. Shortly after, the family was allowed inside. They invited Price to join them, and he led them in prayer.

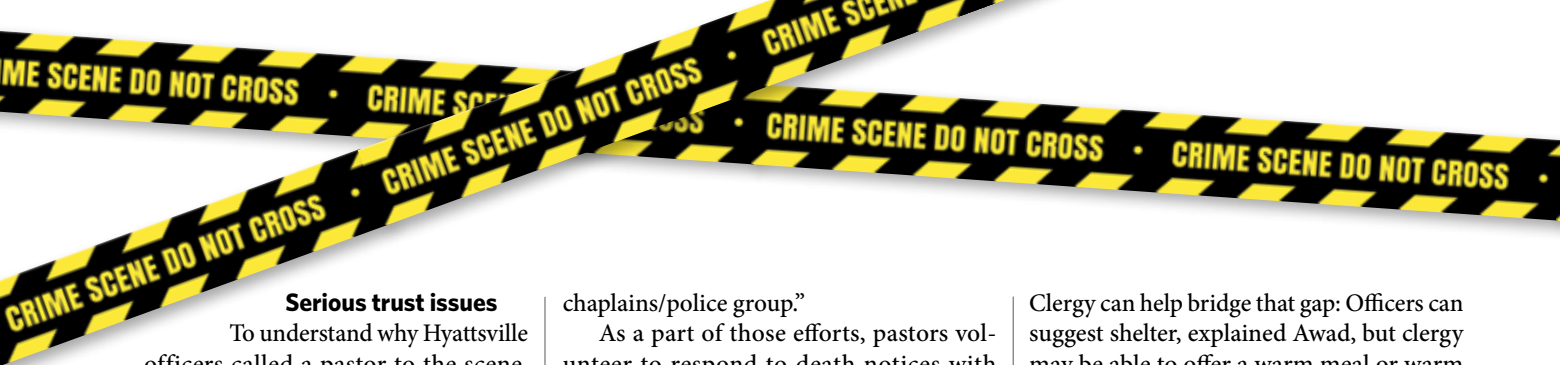
For the family, it was a day of tragedy and grief. For police, it was a daily reality of their job: dealing with death and navigating mistrust from the community they serve. Yet, for a nation where interactions with law enforcement all too often end with violence, it was a small step in the right direction: The police responded to a call, tensions were diffused, and no one got hurt.

Mennonite pastor Cindy Lapp prepares for a ride-along with Hyattsville, Md. police officer Chris Evans.



Photo by Rick Reinhard





Serious trust issues

To understand why Hyattsville officers called a pastor to the scene, rewind to December 2014, when President Obama signed an executive order to create the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Citing the protests that had erupted over law enforcement's role in the deaths of unarmed black men, the task force aimed to find ways to restore trust between communities and law enforcement. Eventually, the task force released guidelines that included more transparency and accountability in police actions, increased community partnerships, and updated officer training on the use of force.

A number of cities made efforts to implement these guidelines, including Philadelphia, which created a 24-member Police Community Oversight Board, and Madison, Wisc., where police officers are now required to use body cameras.

Hyattsville is a mixed-race city in Prince George's County, just outside of Washington, D.C. Like many cities, tension between police and the community is pal-

chaplains/police group."

As a part of those efforts, pastors volunteer to respond to death notices with officers and to participate in occasional "ride-alongs," joining police from the passenger seat as officers patrol their beat and answer calls. The clergy members have shirts and jackets that identify them as community chaplains.

For chief of police Douglas Holland, the presence of a pastor is a welcome addition because officers often have a technical job to do that may take priority over other matters. "Sometimes it may look like the officers are just being hard or callous or not paying a lot of attention to the emotional needs of some



Rev.
Nathan
Hill



Rev. Tracey
Perry

"If we're just going from one crisis to the next, it's really difficult to build any trust and communication."

pable: In March 2016, a black plainclothes detective, Jacai Colson, was shot by a fellow officer who mistook Colson for a civilian. This February, an off-duty officer was killed by a civilian when the officer stepped in to aid a neighbor who was being threatened by her estranged husband.

Incidents like these are why the Hyattsville Police Department called Price to the scene that January day. Since June 2016, the department has partnered with local clergy. "The city held a breakfast at which they invited us to explore ways that the city might partner with the town's faith community," said Price of their first meeting in 2016. Elected officials, city staff, and police department representatives also attended, some of whom had participated in discussions at the White House on the Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Shortly after the 2016 gathering, Price and a handful of other pastors agreed to partner with the police; today there are six pastors involved in what they call "the Hyattsville community

of the victims or some of the families," said Holland. "The pastors are there and are able to help with that."

But another aspect of this partnership is a monthly discussion group between the participating clergy, the police chief, and other officers. These meetings take place at the police department, in Holland's office, and those in attendance discuss current national and local events. A recent meeting addressed how police in Hyattsville would respond to a school shooting and what churches could do to prevent such tragedies. Previously, the group strategized how to work together to help Hyattsville's homeless population. Captain Amal Awad, the department's deputy chief, noted that homeless individuals "are sometimes hesitant or apprehensive" to speak with police, but may be more open to a conversation with a pastor.

"However, we are working on removing those barriers to communication; our focus is earning and building trust," said Awad.

Clergy can help bridge that gap: Officers can suggest shelter, explained Awad, but clergy may be able to offer a warm meal or warm bed or even call in a nonprofit to help.

Taking a risk

When Rev. Nathan Hill, pastor of University Christian Church in Hyattsville, heard about the group, he was eager to join.

"I think it was coming out of Ferguson, out of Baltimore, some of the unrest, the riots, the anger, the division, the disconnect, the injustice of those situations," said Hill. He explained that the police chief and some of the clergy were looking for a way that pastors could help mediate in crisis situations, but quickly realized, "We couldn't do that if we didn't have any relationship at all," said Hill. "If we're just working off of crisis moments, going from one crisis to the next, it's really difficult to build any trust and communication."

Yet for many of the clergy who joined the group, the main goal wasn't to lay the groundwork for mediation during a potential future crisis, but rather, to keep instances that necessitate protests from happening at all.

Rev. Cynthia Lapp, pastor of Hyattsville Mennonite Church, was motivated to join the group by the repeated "not guilty" verdicts that have been delivered in cases of police violence against people of color. "I've gone to Black Lives Matter protests, and that's empowering for the night, for that day, but I don't know what kind of difference it will make in the long run," said Lapp. "I feel like this is something that I hope will have more of a long-lasting impact than a one-time protest."

For Rev. Perrin Rogers of Triumphant Church, a Baptist congregation, the meetings have been an opportunity "for [police] to see a black male in a light that they probably wouldn't ordinarily see." He also values the opportunity to share his congregation's perspective on law enforcement—a perspective he feels would otherwise go unmentioned. Rogers cites a topic posed by the police chief during one of their meetings about whether officers should wear riot gear during protests.

"I said, 'Just speaking from the perspective of a black male, not even as a black

Continued on Page 24



Can We Talk?

When LAPD shot an unarmed homeless man, I wanted to respond. But how?

by **DELONTE GHOLSTON**

Top, a chalk outline at the scene of Charly Keunang's death. At right, a Trust Talk gathering between citizens and police.



Human Writes

IN MARCH 2015, as video after video of police violence flooded the nation with outrage, grief, and hashtags, an unarmed homeless man named Charly “Africa” Keunang was shot and killed in downtown Los Angeles by the LAPD. In a city still bearing scars from the ’92 uprising that followed the beating of Rodney King on live television, Ferguson and all that followed was but the latest reminder of what happens when black grief is met by a militarized police force.

As a young pastor in downtown LA, I wanted to respond but didn’t know how. After reaching out to local community leaders for wisdom, I called Officer Deon Joseph, a 20-year veteran of the LAPD, adored by some and abhorred by others on Skid Row. Together, we agreed to form a team of pastors, officers, and community members to restore trust between the community and the police. We held a community vigil to honor Brother Africa and hundreds came; the officers in attendance bitterly wept.

We also launched a trust-building effort called “Trust Talks.” Over the next two years, we brought together more than 500 nearby residents to engage in honest, professionally facilitated conversations around tables with local police officers. Partnering with local universities, service providers, activists, and faith leaders, the tables focused on hearing the community’s pain and crafting proactive solutions to change policing and save lives. The work spread quickly throughout downtown and across LA.

In 2017, we partnered with PICO California, a faith-based organizing network. This partnership enabled us to train police

recruits on implicit bias and systemic racism in policing. We were also able to advise the LAPD on the education and training of all officers. We collaborated with other activists to pressure the LAPD to honor the solutions that citizens and officers prioritized at the Trust Talks.

Changing policing in America is an immense task and Trust Talks are, in many ways, inadequate to meet the most intractable challenges presented by police unions, the officer bill of rights, and a



Trust Talk

mountain of cases that favor officers over citizens. Yet as a believer and a pastor, I am compelled to hold two truths in tension: The table is the place where Jesus truly shows up as Lord, yet Jesus turns over the tables of injustice. Trust Talks are an effort to first bring officers and the community to the table—and then decide which tables must be overturned. ■

Delonte Gholston is lead pastor at Peace Fellowship Church, a multicultural, multi-socioeconomic community in the Deanwood neighborhood of Washington, D.C.



Continued from Page 22

pastor, just as a black male, that's very alarming," said Rogers. "Not having riot gear helps to bring more connection and not be so off-putting."

It's complicated ...

Yet the partnership has its challenges. Though Rogers describes the partnership as part of the gospel's call to "a ministry of reconciliation," he knows that some of his parishioners still have their reservations about police.

"I think that they see the need for conversation, and anything that we can do to be proactive, they see that as a good thing," said Rogers of his congregation. "But there are still some suspicions around police and how they respond to people of color."

Rev. Tracey Perry, who serves as associate minister at University Christian Church alongside Rev. Hill, agreed. "PG County has had many issues with police officers with African-American young men—corruption and brutality," she explained. At the same time, she was eager to become a community chaplain. "I wanted to be a part of that and have that dialogue and that discourse and be a black face in the room," she said.

For some pastors, the challenges they faced reflected tensions in their own church. "I serve a church that's multiracial," explained Hill. "One family in my church, their son serves with the PG County police, and they're very sensitive about negative comments about police, which I certainly understand, because they understand the fear of every time he goes on duty and the pressures of it."

"But at the same time I also have people in my congregation who have had negative experiences, time and time again, have felt dehumanized and victimized by police in their encounters. So I'm holding both of those communities in tension, like, 'How do I be a pastor to all of these folks and also be open to learning something new and developing this relationship?'"

Lapp faced her own turmoil as a Mennonite. "We've been very committed to peace, which has meant not participating in the military, not becoming involved with police departments, and people with guns—we stay away from all that stuff," she said. "And yet, I was feeling like, 'As a white

person, how do I step into this horrible space where there's so much violence and racism?' It's a complicated space; is there a role for an older, white, woman pastor in this?"

For Lapp, it's important to keep a critical distance, even while building real relationships. "We're community chaplains with the police," Lapp said, "not police chaplains."

Does it work?

But the real question about Hyattsville's partnership between clergy and police is whether such efforts are making any lasting changes. Activist and educator Brittany Packnett, who served on Obama's Taskforce on 21st Century Policing and co-founded Campaign Zero, an organization dedicated to ending police violence in America, isn't sure. Though she said she wouldn't automatically dismiss the idea of police teaming up with clergy, she warned against efforts that "make the police *seem* nicer as opposed to the things that are being done to make sure that police *are* nicer."

"There is not a single fix to this issue," said Packnett. "What we have learned is that it requires comprehensive efforts in order to actually see a decrease in police violence in our community." She emphasized that partnerships of this nature should ensure greater accountability and focus on building relationships with the police that offer community members more say in police policies.

Frederick Davie, the acting chair of the New York City Civilian Complaint Review Board, which is the nation's largest police oversight entity, is more optimistic. "I've witnessed firsthand how cooperation between faith-based communities and the law enforcement community can be a platform for positive change," said Davie, who is also a Presbyterian minister.

Though there is no single measure for success, Davie believes any action that improves police-community interaction has the potential to make the community safer and more peaceful. "The more open faith leaders and police are to engaging in this dialogue, the better able they will be to have a positive influence on the relationship between the police and the community," he said. "Each is a bridge-builder to the other."



Brittany Packnett,
co-founder of
Campaign Zero

Brittany Packnett warns against "making the police *seem* nicer vs. making sure police *are* nicer."

So far, it seems as if Hyattsville is headed in a good direction. Private Jessica Mathews, who has been an officer for seven years and with Hyattsville PD since June, sees the pastors as a bridge between the police and community. She's also welcomed the opportunity to turn to the pastors for personal spiritual guidance. Ultimately, she hopes the partnership with clergy helps "the community to see that we're not always locking up bad people; we're helping people, too."

Rev. Perry agrees. "We work with some really intentional and conscientious officers who want to build trust, who are trying to have the community interact and engage with them in such a way that it diminishes the fear. And they utilize us to try to be that bridge," she said.

Despite being a bridge, clergy are clear about their boundaries. When Rev. Price first considered joining the group, he made it clear to Chief Holland that he wouldn't be a mouthpiece for the department or its policies: "I'm really interested in being part of this, but I need to tell you something about me," Price explained. "I'm an advocate for Black Lives Matter. I believe in immigration reform. You need to know this about me. You need to know where I'm coming from. I am not somebody who wants to badge-up and play cop." And as Price was glad to learn, that wasn't a problem. ■

Quintin J. Simmons is a Washington, D.C.-based writer, editor, and reporter examining race and religion. He holds graduate degrees in political science from George Washington University and journalism from Georgetown.



Catherine Woodiwiss

Bodily Prayer

NOTHING MAKES sense in the desert. Rocks that should be rock-colored sprout purple and pink under an impossibly blue sky. Barren cacti produce new blossoms. A wintry shade blisters in the sun. Canyon stone, having survived a billion years of harsh wind and water, crumbles in a human hand.

In a time when technology increasingly serves to nullify our bodies, the desert's physicality obliterates the mind.

I've come to the Grand Canyon to remember that I still have a body, pitching camp in one of the last

"Wow."
"Stunning."
"Ouch."
"Drink more water, *now*."

I'm relearning to pray with my body instead of my mind.

It's disorienting to consider the soul knit to a fleshy animal, rather than paired with an enlightened brain. Early Christian gnostics believed our perfect souls were trapped in the decaying flesh of an evil physical world. Gnostics rejected the body, worshiping the mind as primary communicator with the soul.

Today, this elevation of the mind has returned in the philosophy of our most popular technologies. Our phones are increasingly acting as extensions of our brains, reminding us what we've learned, read, bought, and believed. Google, Twitter, and Facebook's neural networks are accumulating the world's data, automated beyond our individual brains.

For many tech pioneers, including Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, the ideal future for humanity is a constantly stimulated mind—virtual reality as the ultimate escape for our brains, away from the brutish limits of our bodies.

"We have always sought

new ways of understanding ourselves out of conundrum we find ourselves [in]—namely, that we are animals, too," writes Ethan Richardson. "That we get sick and we die." In gnostic traditions, today's transhumanism finds its creed: All mind, no body; all perfection; no risk or loss of control.

But the alien desert of the American Southwest has been a counterimaginarium for embodied futurists. Madeleine L'Engle wrote *A Wrinkle in Time* after a drive out West and came away describing the ultimate evil, "It," as a gigantic, disembodied brain. It is not information that threatens humanity, she suggests, but a mind or soul divorced from its body. Risk the body, lose the soul.

This Christian understanding of humanity—that we are created as we are because we are loved, wholly and sinewy—reminds us to pray with our feet and remember that we have them.

God has placed eternity in the fleshy, beating hearts of humans. As we race toward the promise of virtual realities, I wonder what risks being lost in the infinite horizon. ■

Catherine Woodiwiss is deputy web editor at Sojourners.

God has placed eternity in the fleshy, beating hearts of humans.

places on Earth where wireless data won't reach. Simone Weil writes that prayer is an act of paying attention, and in the absence of overactive phone-brain, I'll be sleeping outside for a week, listening to rivers and silence, kayaking along canyons, hiking through severe elevation, relying on basic survival instincts.

Halfway into the deep, the dehydrating grandeur of the canyon has completely overridden my brain. Thoughts are reduced to kinesthetic responses:



Stepping

Practicing Sabbath as an act of resistance can create space to engage in the 'holy work of mending the world.'

by **J. DANA TRENT**

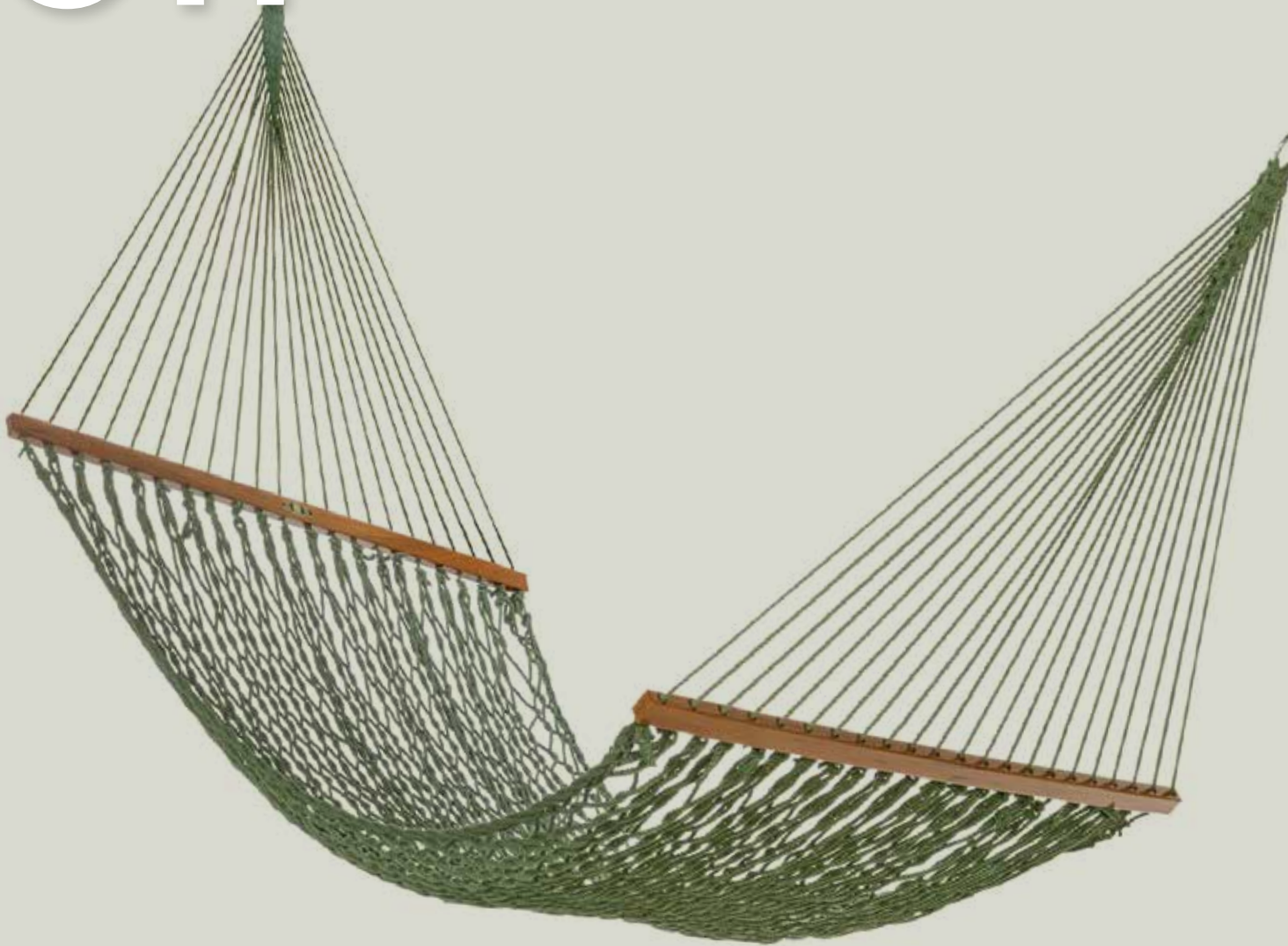
"AMERICA FIRST" is not a new mantra. While Donald Trump used the phrase during his campaign and in his inaugural address, some of its most telling roots are in the America First Committee of the 1940s, which advocated staunch isolationism (and less explicitly, anti-Semitism) and sought to prevent the U.S. from entering the second World War.

For Trump, the phrase is connected to economic wealth. "I'm 'America First,'" Trump told *The New York Times* in a pre-election interview. "But you can't make America great again unless you make it rich again."

When Trump declares he will make "America" first and rich, he's clearly not referring to everyone in the U.S. "America first" is a battle cry for the privileged, those who already reap tremendous benefits off the backs of the marginalized. When Trump wants America to be first by being rich, he means white Americans at the helm of corporations and lobbies, whose success comes at the expense of others.



Off the Merry-Go-Round





The commandment to rest is completely antithetical to Pharaoh's (and Trump's) dictatorial agitation.

'Prosperity breeds amnesia'

Christianity is rooted in a gospel narrative that urges its adherents to strip ourselves of attachment to worldly treasure and the egoism of being first (see Matthew 20:16). Despite that, Trump's most supportive base is among white evangelicals. As Frederick Douglass put it, "Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference."

Why has so much of modern (white) U.S. Christianity—with its scriptures of the "first shall be last" and in light of hard-earned historical lessons of slavery, the Civil War, and the civil rights movement—aligned itself with values so antithetical to Jesus' message? Perhaps some of the answer can be found in an insight from Walter Brueggemann's *Sabbath as Resistance*: "Prosperity breeds amnesia."

Have we forgotten the story of Exodus? Norman Wirzba of Duke Divinity School described Pharaoh's frenetic "Egypt first" policy of brick-building—the original pyramid scheme—as "the wealth of the few ... secured at the expense of the many." Scripture is clear, Wirzba says: We simply must do better than this.

Like Pharaoh, Trump wants his "mammon" (Hebrew for money, wealth, or riches) to grow. But Brueggemann warns that mammon comes at the cost of "endless desire, endless productivity, and endless restlessness." Restlessness is a trait we've become accustomed to under Trump. It arrives in the form of angry tweets, ill-informed executive orders, and wall-building rhetoric that condones and perpetuates white supremacy.

How did God's people resist under Pharaoh to become free? They fled to the desert, under Moses's leadership, where they had nothing, but built community shaped by cooperation and love. God then gave them

commandments of rituals and ethics—including the obligation to rest—a mitzvah completely antithetical to Pharaoh's (and Trump's) dictatorial agitation.

Have the sons and daughters of Abraham—and the people of the New Covenant in Christ—forgotten tyranny as we enjoyed American prosperity? Have we stripped the gospels and the story of Exodus so sharply from our canon that we've proof-texted our way into forgetting Pharaoh's tyranny or Jesus' commandments?

Negative and positive duties

How will the people of God break free from the modern Pharaoh's enticing chains of first and rich? By acknowledging that we actually serve a God who is neither obsessed nor preoccupied with being first or rich. Rather, this is God who incarnates as a servant, who commands *shabbat* and love for neighbor.

Bowing down to the God of love, and not to Pharaoh, means that we utilize the fourth commandment ("Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy") as both a negative

and positive duty.

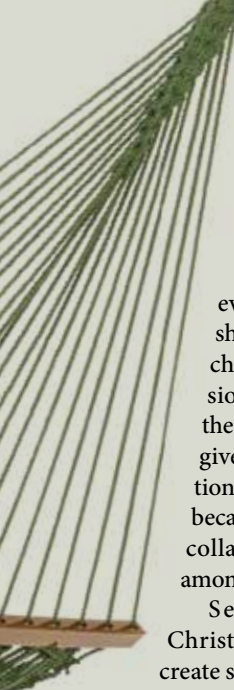
First, we must embrace a negative duty to cease from conscious or unconscious participation in this system of violence and oppression accentuated, perpetuated, and maintained by Pharaoh.

An institutional approach to human rights, according to Yale's Thomas Pogge, emphasizes that citizens have a moral duty to refrain from participating in oppressive institutions. And the economic institutions that surround us, as Wirzba describes, are built on oppression. "Whether we care to admit it or not," Wirzba writes, "the church bears a great responsibility for the fact that we are abettors and willing participants in one of the most rapacious, violent, and destructive economies the world has ever known, an economy in which natural habitats, families and local communities, and moral principles are regularly sacrificed for the sake of financial gain."

The problem with worshipping at the altar of mammon—often a cloak for systemic racism—is that it's the altar of Pharaoh, not Jesus. The white American dream so many

Remember the Sabbath

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. —Exodus 20:8-11



evangelicals voted for stands in sharp contrast to the gospel—a challenging narrative of inclusion where love, not bricks, is the commodity, freely shared and given to all. But love—cooperation—is the enemy of capitalism, because it fosters community and collaboration, not competition. among peoples.

Second, in Pogge's view, Christians have a positive duty to create systems of care to protect and empower the oppressed from coercive institutions. These systems of care fulfill the greatest commandment: loving God and loving our neighbor. By opting out of Trump's mammon empire, we can opt in to rightly centered systems. From the Israelites to Gandhi's obstructive and constructive programs of resistance, the idea of negative and positive duties has for centuries led to societal change. Using this lens for the fourth commandment of ritual rest from our labor, we opt out of tyranny and opt into care for one another.

Opting Out

Sabbath—the longest of the 10 commandments—is both the tie back to Egypt and the fulcrum to the future. Remembering the Sabbath to *lekadsho* (“sanctify it”) becomes the bridge from our ritual way of life with God to our ethics toward family and neighbors. But Sabbath is not only for individuals and Israelite families; God says it must be extended to servants, animals, and strangers. Everyone—not just those in Trump's America First—gets a day off.

“Sabbath-keeping is a way of making a statement of peculiar identity amid a larger public identity, of maintaining and enacting a counter-identity,” Brueggemann explains. It is a “bodily act of *testimony* to alternative and *resistance* to pervading values and the assumptions behind those values.”

As much as our privilege allows, we can use Sabbath to opt out of the mammon machine one day per week. If all U.S. Christians did this, we'd harness and mimic the enormous economic power of the most successful boycotts. But nothing will change if we remain in our silos, allowing the allure of prosperity and the power of empire to obstruct the true meaning of the gospel.

And Sabbath is practiced in community: “God did not give this commandment to a person but to a people, knowing that only those who rested together would be equipped to resist together,” Barbara Brown Taylor wrote in *The Christian Century*. Keeping Sabbath not only prevents our own exhaustion but also defends against the exploitation of others.

Opting In

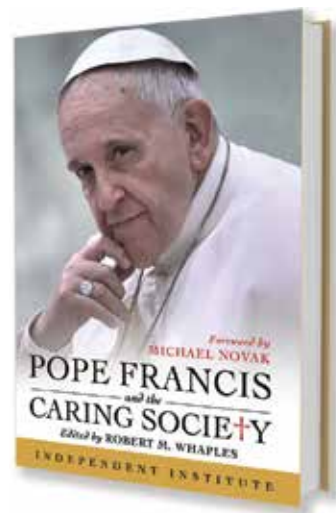
Real Sabbath, Brown Taylor insists, is done in community each week and every seven years, Leviticus 25-style. Everyone and everything is affected: Land and animals are given rest; debts are forgiven; those who work in bondage (literally or metaphorically) are freed. It's the kind of wild community cooperation we've come to expect from a triune God. Traditional order is turned upside down; the rules of the game are changed; new systems are created.

But such a radical interweaving of community dependence will not arrive in a white American Christianity that has too much invested in benefiting from Trump's ethos of “America first and rich.” Resistance as a community, Brown Taylor insists, comes from those who remove themselves from the merry-go-round to join God in *tikkun olam*, the “holy work of mending the world.”

Sabbath as resistance is nearly impossible to practice in isolation. We must opt out of mammon to create new systems of care for the marginalized in our communities. Like Gandhi's *satyagraha* (“truth force”) movement, our positive duty is to create spaces that foster truth, love, nonviolence, fearlessness, tolerance, and the dissolution of the U.S. “caste” system.

May we, like the Israelites, turn to God each week, to remember and keep holy the fulcrum commandment that connects us to the Divine and to one other. May we be reminded that systems of oppression and coercion can only be perpetuated by our participation. If we, as Christians, use Sabbath as a tool of resistance—both in a negative and positive duty—we free ourselves and others from the bigotry of America first and rich. ■

J. Dana Trent, a Baptist minister, is author of For Sabbath's Sake: Embracing Your Need for Rest, Worship, and Community. She lives in North Carolina.



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Edited by ROBERT M. WHAPLES
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My congregation, All Souls Episcopal Parish, is in a college town. In the summer when students and faculty go on break, our numbers thin considerably, so we move the pews to create a more intimate space in the round. But today was not an average summer Sunday. The pews were overfull. People were sitting on the sides, and there were extra chairs in the back.

My son Samson stood in front of our pew. One of the men in the congregation knelt and fixed his bow tie. The Sunday morning sunlight was streaming through the stained glass and the skylight. I hugged friends. *This is going to be good, right?* I prayed. *Please, Lord, I hope we're doing the right thing.*

On Aug. 13 we renamed and blessed my son, Samson Red Gabriel. Samson is transgender. That week we had gone to court to legally change his name and gender, and that week he turned 10. That Sunday held the joy of five baptisms, all the hilarity and devotion that goes along with that, and this incredible rite that had never been done before in the Episcopal Church. As far as we know, nothing like it had been done for a child in a mainline church before, period.

SAMSON'S BLESSING

**A mother's account of her transgender son's
renaming ceremony—the first to be
done in the Episcopal Church.**

by **DANI GABRIEL**

A happy—and recently renamed in an Episcopal church rite—Samson in the sanctuary of his welcoming church home.



After a long period of exploration, my daughter Isabel came out as a boy named Samson, and he was ecstatic. That excitement quickly faded with the arrival of awkwardness, inappropriate comments, and harassment at school. There were all kinds of discussion in the news about transgender people, the military, bathrooms, and Trump. Samson was confused, hurt, and overwhelmed. As Samson's parents, we were also overwhelmed and terrified. Samson's papa and I are both queer, with complicated gender identities of our own. Many of our chosen family, Samson's aunts and uncles, are queer and transgender. We felt relief in knowing that Samson would grow up in our protective bubble. "Kids these days have it so much easier than we did," we thought. We were wrong.

By the end of March, Samson was in a deep depression. All of his sparkle and talkativeness was gone. His downhill slide ended with a four-day hospitalization. The hospital was about an hour from where we live, and I remember driving back and forth every day. I wasn't sleeping. People brought us food, but I didn't taste it. My little boy was hurting, and I couldn't fix it.

The moral principle

The first time we visited Samson, our priest, Mother Liz, came with us. She sat on the bed with Samson. He asked her to pray for him, and she anointed him. Her presence kept me mindful of the Spirit's presence, even there. Samson left the hospital and, bit by bit, got stronger and began to ignore the bullies, looking to his friends, family, and church family. Church was his safe space. When he came up the aisle in his acolyte robes on Sundays, I relaxed a little. Samson was going to be okay.

Sometime later, we were sitting at a cafe a few blocks from church when Samson asked Liz, "Could you rebaptize me?" She said "No, we baptized you, it worked the first time. But we can do something special." Over the next couple of months, we shared ideas back and forth, and Liz did some hard work. She researched, talked to other clergy, and wrote a beautiful rite for Samson based on the form of commitment to Christian service in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

There have been some blessings and renamings of transgender adults in mainline Christian traditions. There are several beautiful and affirming rites, but they are all for adults. Their language speaks to the experiences of people much further along in life than children. Transgender children and youth have particular challenges. Families feel isolated, fending off suggestions that their children are "playing" or that it's wrong to allow a child to transition. A mom I know feels totally embattled. She's fighting the administration at her transgender kid's school and defending her child within their extended family; she's lost someone she counted on because of her kid's transition.

Transgender inclusion is the expansion, for all of us, of our capacity to follow Christ.

She is an unconditionally supportive mom, but transgender youths who face rejection by their families make up 20 to 40 percent of homeless youth. A rite like this, and the support of clergy, holds the young person and their family.

Rev. Liz Tichenor and Rev. Phil Brochard, our associate rector and rector, are revolutionaries in the most Episcopalian way possible. They were 100 percent willing to take the risk of publicly supporting Samson and our family in this way, but they were not going to go rogue. They were going to do it with our bishop's approval. They were going to make it real. Our bishop, Rt. Rev. Marc Andrus, helped edit and approve the final rite, and this meant a lot to Samson. It meant that it wasn't just our parish family that loved him. It was the church, too. And what follows is that God loves him, too.

Our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, had this to say in a statement about the ban on transgender people in the military: "I am compelled to oppose these actions and to affirm the moral principle of equal rights for all persons, including the LGBTQ communities. I do so as a follower of Jesus Christ, as presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, and as a citizen who loves this country." Again, a revolutionary in the most Episcopalian way. He's not going rogue. We

don't do this alone. This is how we behave, as followers of Jesus Christ, as the bearers of his love.

This is so often not the case. I volunteer as a chaplain, and one of my trainers told me that if I encounter a transgender person who is suicidal, I *must* say, "God does not condemn you," that that—more than any other statement—is critical. LGBTQ people have grown up in religious institutions, and I have the most experience with people who grew up in Christian traditions, being rejected, shamed, and excluded. It is estimated that 40 percent of transgender people attempt suicide. And there is no way to know what the real number of attempts and suicides is, because of reporting gaps and because the deaths of transgender people are often shrouded in shame and secrecy. Much of the pain LGBTQ people struggle with comes from the communities

that are supposed to hold us up, communities that are supposed to be centered around the teachings of Jesus Christ. That has been some of my own experience.

"The church I know"

So there we were, in the sun and shadow, with Tripp fixing Samson's pink polka dot bow tie. And I was thinking, *Maybe we shouldn't do this*. I was thinking about telling Liz, "Maybe you believe in transgender rights, maybe you want to support transgender youth, but maybe not this kid. Should the media show up, we are not the family you want to be seen with. Queer parents, covered in tattoos, Samson's sister with her pink hair. You should wait for a nice family."

"How much love is there, really? How much room in the body of Christ is there, really?"

"This is going to be a disaster."

After the beauty of the baptisms, it was Samson's turn. We stood in front of the stained glass: me, my partner Jonah, Samson's sister Magdalene, and Samson's godparents. Samson nodded vigorously to Liz's question, "Samson, do you claim again your identity as a beloved child of God?" And then came the singing, and the holy water, and the crying. And then we shared communion, for real, in a way I didn't feel



like I had before. Afterward I watched parishioners, young and old, of every imaginable background, come up to Samson and tell him congratulations. I know for a fact that some of these people have very different political views than I do. I imagine some of them didn't understand. But these are our brothers and sisters, and the love of Christ is big. Really big.

The support of a church is different from the support of a parent, teacher, or another institution. The rite we did for Samson spoke to a love that follows him everywhere, at all times. It was done on behalf of a community that he can turn to when we, as his family, fail, when his friends fail, when his school fails. It targets a deep shame that he has picked up from so many places, a shame that says that he is a mistake, that he is outside of the circle. "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away" (Song of Solomon 8:6-7). At its best, this is what the church can do.

Over the months since Samson's blessing, it has come up at church over and over. People have told me about the pain that lingered from their childhood experiences with a punitive church. They have told me that witnessing Samson's blessing changed things for them, that it changed what they thought church could be. And my LGBTQ community has felt it deeply. They are absolutely blown away, and it has started an unfolding of healing. Even my hairdresser cried when

Continued on Page 34

'Do You Claim Again Your Identity?'

The rite used for Samson's blessing, written by Rev. Liz Tichenor.

Presider, Samson, and his parents and godparents gather near the front. One godparent lights Samson's original baptismal candle from the paschal candle as the presider begins.

Presider: Dear friends in Christ, we trust that God has known every one of us from the time we were being knit together in the womb, making us in their image. At every turn in the wonder of creation, God paused to name that life is very good indeed. Throughout the ages, God has called people to follow and renamed them in the journey: Jacob wrestled God's angel through the night and emerged blessed as Israel; God renamed Abraham and Sarah as they gave themselves to God's covenant in the wilderness; scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he began a new life as Paul, a trailblazer for God's love. We too are called to open ourselves to God's ongoing revelation. Today, we come together to celebrate Samson's unfolding understanding of God's revelation, marked by his taking on a new name. (Presider turns to Samson.)

Presider: Samson, do you claim again your identity as a beloved child of God?

Samson: I do.

Presider: Will you continue to listen for God's call in your life, opening yourself to the Spirit's revelation?

Samson: I will, with God's help. (Presider turns to the congregation.)

Presider: Will all you here present do all in your power to love and support this person in his newly revealed life in Christ?

All: We will!

Presider (to parents and godparents): Name this child.

Parents and Godparents: Samson Red Gabriel.

Presider: Samson, may your name be a blessing. Share that blessing freely. (Presider lays a hand on Samson.)

Presider: Let us pray. Almighty God, look with favor upon Samson, who has now reaffirmed his commitment to follow Christ and to serve in His name. Give him courage, patience, and vision as he bears this new name, and strengthen us all in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to others, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. ■

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Continued from Page 33

I told her. “That’s not the church I know,” she said. “Yeah, it’s not,” I said. Transgender inclusion in the church is not a political issue. It is the coming home of people who have been denied their full personhood and the recognition that they are beloved of God. It is the expansion, for all of us, of our capacity to follow Christ.

What the church could be

Transgender people have so much to offer the church. In 2012, the Episcopal Church voted to remove the legal barriers to transgender people being ordained. Chris Paige, a organizer and educator on transgender spirituality, says, “Some of the fundamental religious questions—Who am I? How do I

“We too are called to open ourselves to God’s ongoing revelation.”

fit into the world?—those are very familiar questions that people ask on a journey of gender exploration.”

This change in church canons does not mean universal acceptance. Many transgender people are still discouraged from becoming clergy. But paths of transgender clergy offer guidance to the whole church, and the perspectives of transgender people widen our worlds and open our eyes to difference and to our common humanity. And, like anyone else, transgender people can become a part of the church in many ways: maybe as activists, but maybe as lectors or vestry members or ushers.

We have a lot of questions to ask ourselves right now, about who we want to be as the holy catholic church. I believe that we have just started a turn around a corner. A lot of people took risks to make Samson’s rite happen. A lot of people put aside their judgments to demonstrate that the love of God has no bounds.

I asked Samson how he felt that day. He said, “I feel like the luckiest boy in the world.” A few weeks later, Samson told us that when he grows up, he is going to be a professional basketball player, a lawyer, or the first openly transgender bishop in the Episcopal Church. I like that last one, I told him. But someone might get there first. ■

Dani Gabriel is a writer and lives with her partner and two kids in the Bay Area. She is a postulant for the diaconate in the Episcopal Diocese of California.

Manna

Prayer is invisible and advisably secret.
If we could hear the inaudible contents
it might sound like the roiling of a mighty river
over scrabbly rocks, or the whirr of infinite
prayer wheels generating the world-winds
atop some hidden mountain.

All I know is that the breath of the heart
escapes its bounds.
The tail of the comet streaks into the ether
burning faster than any silver bullet.

It doesn't stick in the brain to recoil and rewind,
but flies like a light-arrow toward the stars
by force of desire returning home.
Before the bow-string stops vibrating
it has traveled around the world three times.

Yearning reaches out hard with both hands.
Hoping blows down the walls.
Desperation breaks the sound barrier.
Gratitude sinks deep into warm earth.

The coming back of prayer is big change!
The prescription is entirely individual.
It has been, among many things,
a pebble in my shoe,
finding lost objects,
being saved from possible humiliation,
the voice of a cricket on a mountain walk
saying, "I love you. I love you."

Manna was only good for one day.
It tasted like coriander
and was gathered fresh every morning in skirts.

Sharon Murfin is a musician, teacher, and music-thanatologist. She lives in Seattle. Images: Shutterstock





By Christina Colón

A Soundtrack of **Reconciliation**

Urban Doxology builds bridges with worship music and more.

ON A TUESDAY EVENING in February, the band called Urban Doxology rehearses for an upcoming performance in Richmond, Va. They jump from song to song without sheet music or a printed set list.

“We who believe in freedom cannot rest,” they sing. “We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes.”

The group’s founder, David Bailey, watches. Dressed in a pink button-down shirt and a brown fedora, Bailey moves about the rehearsal space adjusting sound levels and giving occasional feedback.

Ten years ago, Bailey was leading music at a church in the suburbs when he and his wife felt called to join a budding multiethnic, economically diverse worshiping community in the Church Hill neighborhood of Richmond’s East End, where Patrick Henry gave his famous “Give me liberty or give me death” speech in 1775.

Over time, the community grew into a church, East End Fellowship. It found a home in the Robinson Theater, a brightly colored community arts center named after Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, a Richmond native and tap dancer.

Committed to the work of reconciliation, Bailey began leading cultural competency trainings less than four miles from Monument Avenue, a divided street peppered with statues of confederate leaders, including Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis. Grounded in theology and history, the training provided members with a shared knowledge and language

**Above, Urban
Doxology in
performance.**

Urban Doxology



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The Power

In an intensive eight-week program, interns don't just write songs. They study biblical theology and multicultural worship, discuss race, class, and culture, complete reading assignments, and attend rehearsals. No "Jesus is my boyfriend" songs, as Bailey calls them, are written here. The small cohorts don't just learn about reconciliation, they practice it.

Makeda McCreary, the band's newest vocalist, was working at the Bank of America

"Motown integrated America before legislation integrated America."

in 2016 when Bailey called her about the internship program. "We'd been talking about the internship, and I was avoiding it, and he was like, 'So, are you going to be a banker for the rest of your life?'"

McCreary applied, not knowing that in July of that year Philando Castile would be shot and killed in his car by a Minnesota police officer while McCreary was sharing a room for the internship with the white sister of a cop.

Growing up black in a majority white neighborhood, McCreary went to college vowing to only know people of color. However, the internship changed things. "It just kind of bridged the gap again and was able to shepherd me into being in Urban Doxology, where our mission is reconciliation and bridge-building and connecting with the people of God," she said. "We're all one people under God and our differences connect us, they don't separate us."

Erin Rose, also a vocalist, had a similar experience. "There was no felt need on my part for racial reconciliation in the church or otherwise," she said. "But the internship flipped my whole world upside down and I saw the church in a completely different light. What it meant to be Christian was completely changed."

By 2013 many of the former interns had made homes in Richmond; they decided to make the project more permanent. "I was really inspired by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and how they went around to share about negro

Continued on Page 39

New & Noteworthy



Haley Heynderickx

Images of God

Electric folk singer-songwriter Haley Heynderickx releases her debut album, *I Need to Start a Garden*. Imbued with authenticity and gentle guitar picking, Heynderickx's "Untitled God Song" challenges the masculine imagery so often ascribed to God. Mama Bird Recording Co.

Praying Toward Justice

In *A Booklet of Uncommon Prayer*, educator and liturgist Kenji Kuramitsu offers bold prayers-in-action on topics such as police brutality, domestic violence, and environmental destruction. They lean into the hope that "how we pray is how we believe." Evangelicals for Social Action

Breaking the Silence

In *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention*, Rachael Keefe, grounded in her own story of life-threatening depression, challenges the church to proactively address mental health, depression, and suicide. Includes reflection questions, resources, scriptures, and prayers. Chalice Press

Sing of Love and Justice

For more than 40 years, Ken Medema has been known for his powerful style, witness to God's call to justice, peace, love, and service, and gift for improvising music and lyrics. *The Way I See It Now* offers 21 classic Medema songs, recorded with just voice and piano. Brier Patch Music

to talk about race. However, Bailey sensed it wasn't enough.

He noticed the lack of leadership development for people of color going into vocational ministry. He had also grown wary of the available worship music repertoire. "It was like you either had old-school gospel or we had retuned hymns," he said. East End Fellowship needed more leaders and new songs, ones that better reflected its growing multicultural congregation.

Bailey devised a single solution for the two challenges: a summer internship program dubbed the Urban Doxology Songwriting Internship. "We started the internship so we could develop the kind of leaders we wanted to see as people of color," Bailey said. "But also so we could create the kind of culture and language for worship that shapes the imagination and deals with the pastoral concerns of the people in the community."

In 2011, East End Fellowship welcomed its first class of diverse young musicians to Church Hill.

The 'Slo-Mo Coup' of the Billionaires

2016 TURNED OUT to be the year that the American people woke up and realized that most of them hadn't had a real pay raise in more than 40 years while the oligarchs in our top 1 percent had been making out like bandits. As a result, millions of our fellow Americans voted for a democratic socialist presidential candidate. But, as you may have noticed, even more just got really mad, then went to the polls and did something really crazy.

Sadly enough, we all could have avoided many of our current problems if we had just been reading *In These Times* magazine for the past 40 years.

That's the takeaway from the recent book *The Age of Inequality: Corporate America's War on Working People, a Forty-Year Investigation* by *In These Times*, edited by ITT contributing editor Jeremy Gantz. The book compiles chronologically arranged excerpts from the



From the cover of *The Age of Inequality*

subverts the promise of American democracy, where social needs and rationality, not corporate profit and greed, are the operating principle."

From the beginning, *ITT* was distinguished from the other secular Left news and commentary outlets by its deep coverage of the labor movement and grassroots community organizing and by a perspective that, while avoiding any hint of doctrinaire rhetoric, clearly sees the conflict between corporate power and the common good as the central fact of public life. In 1989, the paper quietly dropped the "socialist" label, and, sometime between then and now, it became a monthly magazine. But, as *The Age of Inequality* demonstrates, not much else has changed.

The book is organized into chapters focused on issues such as trade, the decline of unions and the rise of Wall Street, with a shorter section focused on stories of grassroots campaigns for economic democracy. Here you can learn that the role of "free trade" in the deindustrialization of America was visible as early as 1977 to anyone who went out and talked to factory workers and their elected union representatives. And way back in 1979, Manning Marable was calling out the Democratic Party for becoming "the governing wing of the GOP."

A couple of the more

amusing moments on this walk through history come circa 1993-1994 when we encounter Bill Clinton's secretary of labor, Robert Reich, pleading earnestly for neoliberal economic policies that he has long since renounced. But there's nothing funny about ITT senior editor David Moberg's prophetic assertion in 1993 that the North American Free Trade Agreement would "haunt Clinton and the Democrats who support it for years to come." The "Clinton" in that sentence was Bill, but you get the idea. And, speaking of prophecy, in the chapter on "The Rise of Finance," you can find economist Dean Baker, in 2003, predicting the burst of the housing bubble, several years before those guys in *The Big Short*.

The Age of Inequality and the magazine from which it's drawn are both indispensable resources for anyone who wants to understand how we arrived in this baffling era of "populist" billionaires, and how we might move forward toward a nation ruled by "social needs ... not corporate profit and greed." ■

Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.



The conflict between corporate power and the common good is the central fact of public life.

Chicago-based publication's coverage of labor and the economy from its 1976 launch through the dawn of the Trump era. The result is a sweeping chronicle of the slow-motion coup by which the billionaire class seized all the levers of power in our erstwhile democracy and used them to siphon wealth upward from ordinary workers to the corporate elite.

In These Times was founded as a broadsheet newspaper by James Weinstein, a longtime socialist activist and historian. For the first 13 years of its life, the paper called itself an independent socialist news-weekly and this statement appeared on its masthead: "We believe in a socialism that fulfills rather than

Continued from Page 37

spirituals,” Bailey said. “And I felt like we could do the same thing and share the songs we wrote in our community.”

The annual summer internship program continues, but Urban Doxology became a band of its own, recording albums and performing across the country.

IMBUED WITH HUES of pop, gospel, and R&B, Urban Doxology’s two albums, written by band members and interns, reflect its own reconciliation journey. “Reconciliation is hard,” said vocalist Toya Obasi. “Even the interns are trying to reconcile themselves to one another to be able to share a song.”

From the rapped “Shalom” to the multilingual “Que Seas el Autor,” the intention of reconciliation is what ultimately holds the seemingly unrelated songs together. “The sound of Urban Doxology is a really multifaceted answer because we are considering hospitality in worship,” Bailey said. “We need to be able to go in and out of these different sounds to be able to understand who God is fully and be able to speak in ways that are pastoral to different folks.”

The sentiment resonates with vocalist Kimberly Williams, who also serves as a worship leader at an integrated church in Washington, D.C. “I always feel like music, especially worship music, is like a balm, like an ointment,” she said. “When there are rough things that are happening, there’s something about theological lyrics set to music that creates a soothing presence among people who are different in the same space.”

In many spaces across the country, Urban Doxology’s presence alone has caused needed change. “Most evangelical Christian spaces are dominated by white men,” said Stephen Roach, keys player and the band’s sole white member. “Having a group that’s 100 percent led by black women [vocalists] and is showing that you can be that, even in white spaces—that’s valuable and that’s powerful.”

“We perform in front of [predominantly] white audiences a lot, and there’s always a few brown girls who come up to us afterward,” vocalist Rose added. “It’s representation; they see black girls who have a platform ... and it gives them life to see that.”

While many churches continue to view the sermon as the focus of a Sunday service, Urban Doxology recognizes that it’s the songs



MEMORIES THAT HEAL

CONJURING THE VIEW on a mountain hike, the beloved Americana musician David Wilcox sings “Some things you can’t unsee.” The first time I heard the song, I was struck by the surprise: It’s not just the painful, traumatic interruptions that stay with us. The exquisite, tender, spectacular ones can become permanently intertwined with our more practical thoughts, a backdrop for memory, musing about the future, or just living in the ordinary moments of day-to-day living. The magnificent bonus is that traumatic memories can be healed by reframing them with images and thoughts that empower us beyond victimhood.

Some movies, too, sear themselves into the mind. The memory of a scene and the feelings it aroused may become interwoven. It can be difficult to tell the difference between the movie we saw and whatever was going on in our lives at the time. Sometimes the scene is distressing, but other times it is like an old friend or mentor we can visit for comfort, advice, or a reminder of something useful we had forgotten.

I experienced this recently with the new restoration of **Women in Love**, the 1969 adaptation of D.H. Lawrence’s novel about four people trying and failing to tell each other how they feel and what they need. Its director, Ken Russell, was a warm-hearted artist who couldn’t stand inauthenticity; screenwriter Larry Kramer is implacably opposed

to any rule that crushes the human spirit. Russell went on to make the crazy masterpiece *Tommy*—detonating puritanism and nationalism in favor of a thirst for truly living. Kramer founded Act Up (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) and wrote *The Normal Heart*—committing decades to the struggle for LGBTQ equality and the righteous anger required to confront the AIDS epidemic and the cruel ideology that sought to silence its unbearable burden. Their collaboration on a film was serendipitous.

We’re living in a golden age of film restoration, and the restored *Women in Love* is one of the most shimmering, beautiful films I’ve ever seen. It’s also one of the most challenging depictions of the desire to connect and the obstacles to doing so.

I think Russell and Kramer believed that the truth will set you free; to make this clear they made a film about what happens when societies build themselves on lies. Lies about public reputation mattering more than inner motivation, about socioeconomic status trumping matters of the heart, about aggression being stronger than vulnerability. The characters in *Women in Love* really want to tell the truth; they just don’t quite know how. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.



that people remember come Wednesday. “If I’m a surgeon, I’m going to want the finest tools available, which is why we work hard on the songs,” Rose said. “We’re the worship leaders; we’re the surgeons; so it’s important for each of us to be handling the moment and to be sensitive to the spirit of God.”

URBAN DOXOLOGY members are rarely still when they rehearse. Hands lifted high, the women dance across the stage. Breaks between songs swell with laughter, making the rehearsal feel like one continuous prayer. For them, it is. “If you’re trying to write the soundtrack of reconciliation, you’ve got a heavy load on you,” Rose said.

Striving to be bridge-builders within the congregations they visit, the members of Urban Doxology often find themselves suffering from identity crisis. “When you’re being all things to all people so they’ll know

the opportunity to reflect and recharge. In that space, members refer to themselves as a community and a family, rather than a band.

THE BAND IS currently working on its third full-length album, and is featured in a documentary released in April called *11 am: Hope for America’s Most Segregated Hour*.

Ultimately, members want a studio of their own, so they can both produce year-round and contribute to the multicultural community growing in Church Hill.

“So much of what we’re doing is responding to the needs of [East End Fellowship] and where that church is as a multicultural church in a neighborhood that’s gentrifying in a country with broken systems and a lot of division,” Roach said.

And for those not in Church Hill? Bailey hopes Urban Doxology’s songs will be a blessing to them. He also hopes they’ll be moved to write their own soundtracks. “I hope that what we inspire people to do is to think about their context,” he said. “To write worship for their context and to remember people on the margins as they engage in their worship experiences.”

In a time of national upheaval, Bailey is mindful that racial reconciliation in the church doesn’t happen in the abstract. It happens through relationships and systemic change. In that, music serves as a uniquely powerful tool.

“Motown integrated America before legislation integrated America,” Bailey said. “White people and black people were singing [The Temptations] before the civil rights laws had passed. I think that can be true in the church.” ■

Christina Colón is an editorial assistant for Sojourners magazine.

Reviewed by Andrew Wilkes

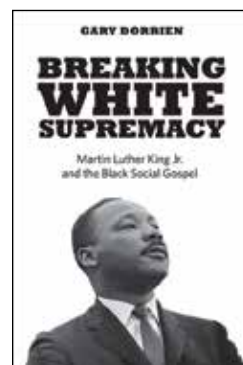
GOOD NEWS

Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel, by Gary Dorrien. Yale University Press.

THE BLACK SOCIAL gospel is a critically important religious tradition—one that Gary Dorrien gives exquisite treatment in *Breaking White Supremacy: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Black Social Gospel*. This is the second installment of a two-volume series. The first, *The New Abolition: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Black Social Gospel*, won the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in Religion. The black social gospel, Dorrien explains, focuses not only on a political economy of justice—on matters including labor, land, and democratic use and ownership of capital—but also, unlike white social gospels, on racial equity.

Breaking White Supremacy explains the family tree of transformative religion that birthed Martin Luther King Jr.’s unique, but not unprecedented, practice of Christianity in Jim Crow America. Dorrien contends that mystic and author Howard Thurman, Morehouse College president Benjamin Mays, and Howard University president Mordecai Johnson provided examples of black Christian piety for King, which along with liberal theological education at seminaries in the northern region of the country shaped King to push America to become the social democracy it has never been.

Breaking White Supremacy walks a fine line that all worthwhile additions to the King literature must walk: celebrating a world-historical figure while also humanizing him; contextualizing the movement that produced him while also noting how his singular presence catalyzed that movement. As an example, and in contrast to flat accounts of King’s nonviolent practice, Dorrien convincingly argues that King did not come to the Montgomery bus boycott with a fully formed theology or theory of peacemaking. Instead, Dorrien’s account suggests that King



Racial reconciliation in the church doesn’t happen in the abstract.

Christ, it can be challenging, isolating, and lonely [work] because you’re always bending in order to be that bridge,” said Williams.

In addition to being bridge-builders, they also serve as safe spaces. “When we do conferences or workshops or worship, we’re that safe space ... and that sometimes gets tiring,” McCreary said. “Because it’s not like you have a community and they have a community—we’re safe spaces for all of these people.”

Since Urban Doxology’s formation, the country has experienced the Ferguson uprising, the Charleston church shooting, and the Unite the Right rally in the neighboring city of Charlottesville. Rehearsals—the intentional time spent together—gives them

was a bit of a bookish pastor with strongly felt but largely unpracticed ideas of how to fuse Gandhian nonviolence into a social gospel ministry at the congregational level—much less the level of a citywide mass movement.

Of special note, Dorrien commits a section of the text to the weighty legacy of Rev. Pauli Murray, the first black woman to ascend to the office of priest in the Episcopal Church and one of the co-founders of the National Organization for Women. Murray's story, too often unheralded, exemplifies a life of poetry, ministry, and lawyering for women's rights, civil rights, and the full voice of marginalized groups within the common life of national and global society.

Dorrien's text poses an inescapable question to the reader: Who and where are exemplars of the black social gospel today? The briefest of surveys reveals a constellation of individuals, institutions, and networks committed to this work. Most prominently, the Moral Mondays movement and the Poor People's Campaign—initiated by Rev. William Barber II, Rev. Liz Theoharis, Yara Allen, and many others—carry the banner with urgency and explicit self-consciousness in this tradition. Opal Tometi's explicitly liberationist Christian faith, practiced through her co-founding of the Black Lives Matter movement, incarnates a black social gospel. We might also note the activist piety of Bree Newsome who, as she snatched down the Confederate flag flying on the grounds of the South Carolina State House, shouted to security guards ordering her to come down, "You come against me with hatred and oppression and violence. I come against you in the name of God. This flag comes down today!"

In a thousand places and myriad forms, the black social gospel of good news among the poor and among those racialized by white heteropatriarchy is blossoming. At 500 pages, *Breaking White Supremacy* is a patient, simmering delight to read, an invitation to sow beloved community in an age of racialized capitalism. ■

Andrew Wilkes is the principal of Wilkes Advocacy Group, an ordained minister, and a doctoral candidate in political science at the Graduate Center, City University of New York.

Reviewed by Karen Gonzalez

ANOTHER KIND OF JOURNEY

Love Undocumented: Risking Trust in a Fearful World, by Sarah Quezada. Herald Press.

ONE OF THE HARDEST things about being an immigrant and advocate for immigrants is an unspoken assumption that immigrating for strictly economic reasons is not as worthy of admission (and compassion) as doing so to flee war or persecution. Historically, this made refugees the "good immigrants," until the current administration began to stoke fear against them. I love that Sarah Quezada turns that idea on its head by sharing the story of her relationship and marriage to an undocumented immigrant who didn't leave his country for anything other than more opportunities and, to some extent, adventure.

Quezada tells a story that is part memoir, part biblical reflection, and part policy and data. She relates how she fell in love with and married an undocumented immigrant, Billy. As they make their way through the maze of the U.S. immigration system, she learns what immigrants know through experience: Gaining legal status is a complex, expensive, and lengthy process. She also reminds readers that many immigrants don't have options to gain legal status, which might shock those who instruct immigrants just to "get in line and wait."

What makes the story compelling is Quezada's own hospitable rhetoric; it is easy to identify with her as she acknowledges knowing next to nothing about immigration before she began dating Billy. In fact, she barely knew people different from herself prior to a move to an urban Los Angeles neighborhood. The gentle humility of her storytelling makes this a book you can recommend to Christians new to the immigration debate. They will learn and come to greater awareness, as Quezada herself does through her journey.

The subtitle of the book is *Risking Trust in a Fearful World*, and Quezada is effective in reminding readers that the default response for Christians when we face the

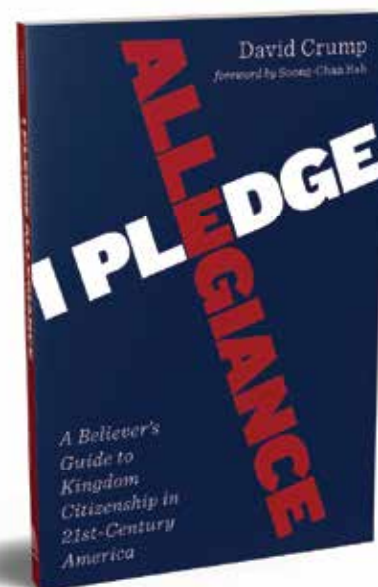
EERDMANS

David Crump

Foreword by Soong-Chan Rah

I PLEDGE ALLEGIANCE

A Believer's Guide to Kingdom Citizenship in 21st-Century America



"A much-needed clarion call for the American church to turn from its divided loyalties and once again embrace the singular devotion to Christ and his kingdom that lies at the heart of the gospel."

— Gregory A. Boyd

ISBN 9780802871749

246 pages

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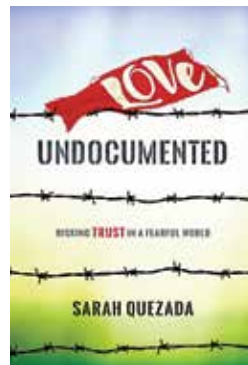
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EERDMANS

uncertain and unknown should be trust in God. This includes the immigrant stranger who may look, speak, and worship differently from us. She finds her stride as she tells the story of her own growth in awareness, love of neighbor, and trust in God. The antidote to fear, Quezada says, is relationship with immigrants—these relationships will not only make us aware of the injustices of our current immigration system, but they will also fuel our zeal for justice.

In spite of these strengths, this book does have, in my opinion, an obvious weakness: Quezada tells stories that would be better told by immigrants themselves, namely her husband, Billy. He was witness to the labor trafficking of other undocumented immigrants and experienced wage theft and mistreatment in his workplace. While Quezada does a good job of



describing these incidents, some power is lost because they weren't *her* stories. It's important for marginalized people to tell their own stories and dispel the myth that they are all voiceless and dependent on dominant culture intermediaries.

Even so, this is a book I recommend. In our current

political moment, and as an immigrant, it blesses my soul immensely to see others stand up for the dignity and inclusion of all immigrants. Quezada emphasizes that while policy can be complicated, loving our neighbors is simple: "We open our arms to immigrants, documented or not, not on the basis of their purity or deservingness but because of Christ's love for us in our undeservedness." ■

Karen Gonzalez is an immigrant from Guatemala, an immigration advocate, and a writer. She works for World Relief.

Reviewed by Katie Dubielak

A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

The Power, by Naomi Alderman. Little, Brown and Company.

THE POWER IS THE fourth novel by Naomi Alderman, protégé of award-winning author Margaret Atwood (*The Handmaid's Tale*). It centers on the discovery among the world's women that they have a unique muscle, called a "skein," embedded into their skin that when activated gives them an electric power that they can use to both hurt and heal.

The story is told through the narration of four protagonists—Tunde, Allie, Margot, and Roxy. Tunde is a journalist who provides the reader a global perspective on overturned social orders and flipped cultural norms through his travels. Allie gives us a glimpse into the religious order forming around women and lightning. Margot is the mayor of an undisclosed U.S. city and walks the reader through the governmental and political consequences of the power. Roxy's



involvement in organized crime affords the perspective of people leveraging a new social order for financial gain.

Alderman explores in depth the role reversals between men and women. Gender-based power structures and assumptions of the previous order do not last as more women discover the power within themselves. Alderman creates a world in which men are seen as

less-than, echoing stereotypes that burden women in our world: "Men are dangerous ... Men are less intelligent, less diligent, less hard-working ... Men are more likely to suffer from diseases and they are a drain on the resources of the country."

Does this novel depict a dystopia or a feminist utopia? Critics have often called it a dystopia. Yet there are women in the world today who live under the same restraints

placed on men in *The Power*, in which men lose the ability to drive cars, own businesses, gather together without a woman present, vote, or travel without permission from a female guardian. We are so used to the inequalities faced by women that they are just the norm, but when these same inequalities are imposed on men, suddenly the universe is broken. If *The Power* is a dystopia for men, our world is a dystopia for many women.

The novel also highlights an age-old question of human nature—are we truly pure and good beings or, when given a choice to be merciful and kind, do we still revert to evil? Men and women alike struggle with what power ultimately means. Violations continue to occur as half of the population comes to grips with an end to centuries of dominance, and the other half tries to balance the potential for revenge with the need for peace and stability.

Having been given physical dominance, many of the women in this book lapse into the same practices and barbaric sexual mistreatment that men formerly perpetrated. Female acquaintances steal Tunde's writings and pictures; when asked why they would do such a thing, he says simply "because they could." Toward the end of the novel, the camp where Roxy and Tunde take refuge is attacked by a group of rogue women. They pillage the camp and rape many of the men: "They know no one cares what happens here ... they do it because they can." Power can corrupt, and different women in the novel, after suffering for generations, use their newfound power both to redeem themselves and to create an atmosphere in which they will never lose dominance again.

Alderman's novel is gripping as it counts down to an event that will later be named the Cataclysm. I was flipping from page to page long after my bedtime. She has created a work that is amusing, striking, dramatic, and feasible. This novel may well serve as a next rallying point of the feminist movement, as it skillfully explores gender dynamics and ultimately lays the patriarchy to rest under a mountain of upended political roles and discarded stereotypes and social constructs. ■

Katie Dubielak is administrative assistant at Sojourners, working on The Summit.

Reviewed by Tobias Winright

MODELS TO LIVE BY

The Violence of Climate Change: Lessons of Resistance from Nonviolent Activists, by Kevin J. O'Brien. Georgetown University Press.

DON'T LET THE prestigious academic publisher put you off: *The Violence of Climate Change* is engagingly informative as it fuses theory and praxis through the narratives of inspirational nonviolent activists. Nor is it satisfied with the ideal, as it honestly and realistically engages current counterarguments and positions throughout. As such, it's exceptionally suitable for undergraduates, who are often surprised, then pleased, to discover religion and theology's relevance for addressing urgent ethical issues.

And what could be more pressing and threatening today than violence—in our city streets and between or within other nations, especially the growing possibility of nuclear war—and climate change? So I hope this book also finds its way to Sunday schools, adult religious education sessions, book club meetings, or pretty much anyone involved in the climate justice movement.

Author Kevin J. O'Brien, dean of humanities and associate professor of Christian ethics at Pacific Lutheran University, defines the problem of climate change as also a problem of structural violence, caused primarily by privileged, powerful nations, corporations, and individuals through simple decisions and complex systems over the generations. Those least responsible are also the most vulnerable and more detrimentally impacted.

O'Brien highlights five U.S. Christians—Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., Cesar Chavez, Jane Addams, and John Woolman—spanning the 18th to 20th centuries and providing lessons in nonviolent resistance not only to war but also to slavery, racism, sexism, poverty, and economic injustice. Although they did not face climate change, these women and men are examples “for creative and active resistance against the violence of climate change ... in an organized, thoughtful, and faithful way.” At the same time, O'Brien notes that they



Jane Addams speaks to a group of children visiting Hull House in Chicago in 1935, one of the first settlement houses addressing urban poverty in the nation. Addams, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931, founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

are only human, with mistakes, failures, and faults—all the more reason why they should inform and inspire us.

Each exemplifies a unique commitment to nonviolence, allowing readers to imagine which resonates most with their own disposition and gifts. Woolman, a Quaker abolitionist, sought to free himself from any personal privileges and benefits derived from the institution of slavery. Addams reflects how one can have a “glocal” (both local and global) impact as she served the poor and immigrant population of her Chicago neighborhood while traveling nationally to lobby the U.S. government for a social safety net and internationally to work for world peace. Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, illustrates how nonviolent activism can incorporate both individual and communal faith commitments. King offers hope as an alternative to “both cynical despair and blind optimism” in an uncertain world. Chavez teaches personal and political sacrifice strategically used.

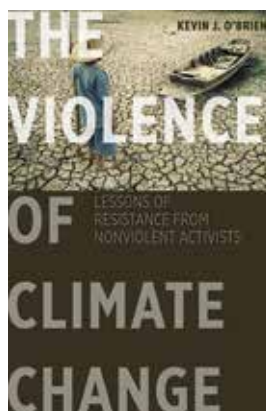
O'Brien perhaps lessens the force of the book's argument when he writes, “I am not trying to prove here that nonviolence is always the best way to resist violence, only that it is sometimes a viable form of resistance and has something important to teach privileged people who seek climate justice.” I would substitute “often” for “sometimes” in that sentence, since empirical studies, such as those by the late Gene

Sharp, demonstrate that nonviolent methods are more effective, and violent means less effective, than generally assumed.

Even “just war” Christians should agree that nonviolent methods of resistance ought to be tried before turning to violence. O'Brien might have looked at how “just war” and more pacifistic Christians could collaborate in nonviolent resistance to the violence of climate change.

The “just peacemaking” paradigm of the late Glen Stassen bridged that divide; while the pacifist and “just war” Christians participating in that project focused on international relations, some attention was given to the environment. Likewise, in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis calls for an “integral ecology” that cares for creation and encompasses his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI's insight that “the protection of creation

and peacemaking are profoundly linked!” We also need an “integral peacebuilding” that gives primacy to the nonviolent resistance approaches O'Brien emphasizes so well but also seeks explicitly and persuasively to include people not committed fully to nonviolence. ■



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The Long Green Season

THIS MONTH'S LESSONS FOCUS on the created world: sabbath, so that we might live in harmony with the created world; physical bodies, with which we experience the created world; creation as the locus of redemption, where the reign of God roots into the earth; and creation as the locus of revelation, where the majesty and mystery of God are made manifest.

In North America we are heading into what is traditionally the hottest part of the summer. The church, meanwhile, is going through the long green season, signifying the growth of the church after the explosion of Pentecost. While we care for the institutions of the church and the souls that make up the church, let us not neglect the earth that bears all of us and our institutions.

What might it mean to read each text with a keen awareness of the ways in which earth, land, and creation appear as characters and setting for the passage? What might it mean to attend to how human characters interact with earth, land, and creation? It may be possible

for the church to get beyond the binaries that exalt spirit over body and church over earth/world. It may be that we are able to hear a call to tend the earth as part and parcel of caring for the souls that are on it—not as a competing agenda.



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[JUNE 3]

Keeping Sabbath

Deuteronomy 5:12-15; Psalm 81:1-10; 2 Corinthians 4:5-12; Mark 2:23-3:6

IN MARK 2:27, the Sabbath is God's gift to humanity, but first it was God's resting space or place in Genesis 2:2. In resting, God sets a holy example for us that would be elevated to a command (Exodus 20:8; 31:14,16). Deuteronomy is a reiteration of the Torah and chapter 5 nearly duplicates the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20. In Mark, keeping the Sabbath is articulated as divine requirement. It's almost as if we hadn't figured out that sabbath was a good gift, good for us, and that we were required by our heavenly parent to take that rest, like a toddler being put down for a nap.

I find it useful when teaching Christians to distinguish between keeping *the* Sabbath and keeping *a* sabbath. My translation of our Deuteronomy passage is: "Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Holy One your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Holy One your God; you shall not do any work ..." Christian celebration of the resurrection on Sunday is not the same thing as Sabbath-keeping—particularly for those of us who are clergy. The

Sabbath is the seventh day; it is not a moveable feast. "Sabbath" and "seven" are forms from the same root word.

The decades I have spent involved with Jewish congregations has helped me with Sabbath-keeping. I find Sabbath is essential to my well-being, as Abraham Heschel argued in his enduring classic *The Sabbath*. Heschel's words "The solution of [hu]man-kind's most vexing problem will not be found in renouncing technical civilization, but in attaining some degree of independence of it" are more than apt in our technological wonderlands. Even when unplugged, the digital world makes it hard to truly rest. Rest here is the cessation of work, one's occupation, and more. It is also revelry. To revel in arts and music and nature and love and literature and scripture and prayer—and even naps—this is Sabbath. God's good gift waits to be discovered anew, even in the busyness of this world.

"Preaching the Word," Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

[JUNE 10]

Get Naked!

Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13 - 5:1; Mark 3:20-35

OUR BODIES ARE every bit God's good gift as anything else in creation. Somehow it is easier to see river otters, pandas, peonies, redwoods, and shooting stars as the handiwork of an Artisan without peer than our inevitably declining bodies. Like Adam covering his nakedness in Genesis 3, our culture is simultaneously obsessed with and perpetually disappointed in our bodies. Our economy would be bankrupt without the products and services marketed to improve our appearances and slow the ravages of time. Men have slightly more permission to grow old, grey, and look distinguished. While there are few grey-haired women with modeling careers, grey hair is fashionable for the young. Yet among the senior women in national public service, in their 60s, 70s, and even 80s, there are no grey hairs to be seen.

At the same time our culture is suffused with nudity and shame about the human body, particularly in the church. Much of that shame stems from biblical texts, such as today's Genesis passage, which are rooted in the Iron Age shame-and-honor dynamics of a particular culture and in the traditional interpretation of those texts. (While the word "shame" is not in Genesis 3:10, the fear the man feels is regularly attributed to it.) That sense of shame is magnified with the Greek dichotomy of body and spirit that creeps into the Epistles. One of the postures of womanist biblical interpretation—an African-American feminist biblical interpretive lens—is a deep appreciation of one's self, particularly one's body, at all times, celebrating one's roundness. Anecdotal evidence suggests black women love our bodies at higher rates than other women. There is freedom in looking at your naked body without shame or judgment, critique or comparison.

Taking the Genesis narratives seriously as a way to imagine the world without (before) the brokenness that has been evident in every age enables us to share our spiritual ancestors' imagination and respond with our own. What if rather than wishing for and cultivating ignorance about our bodies and sexuality—a demonstrably ineffective sex

education paradigm—what if we nurtured and cultivated knowledge about our bodies and boundaries, sexuality and consent? What if the only shame attached to our naked bodies was the shame of not fully honoring the integrity and autonomy of another's body?

[JUNE 17]

Everything Is New

Ezekiel 17:22-24; Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15;
2 Corinthians 5:6-17; Mark 4:26-34

"NEWLY IMPROVED" used to be an effective marketing lure. But we have figured out that often the only improvements were decreased product size and new packaging. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul proclaims that, because of Christ, "everything has become new." This is a fitting message for the season that follows Eastertide. The resurrection is a promise of newness, a promise fulfilled. Yet the Easter light shows that the world is very much the way it has always been.

Amid this world that continues in cycles of violence, cruelty, hoarding of resources, and exploitation of the vulnerable, the newness proclaimed in Corinthians is a transformation of a person who is in Christ. What does our newness mean for the unchanging world? Indeed, if we are honest, the world does not look resurrected on Easter Monday, let alone Easter Sunday afternoon. For some, this is evidence that our faith in Jesus is misguided: Look around, nothing has changed! The story of the gospel is that the witnesses to the resurrection were changed and began changing the world around them so that those who were not witnesses came to believe and be changed.

There is a line from a Negro spiritual that says, "I know I've been changed." It can be a real temptation to see ourselves as beyond the concerns of the world and its troubles because our home is with God and we know we have been changed by the gospel. Yet, Jesus sketches out the contours of the reign of God that is rooted in the very earth. Our newness in Christ does not remove us from the brokenness of the world. The images Jesus uses in his teaching are not of a realm in the clouds but of a reality that binds heaven and earth together. Our newness is that we no longer live for ourselves but for Christ, who died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). This is

a new thing in the world—prioritizing the needs of others over ourselves because we have been transformed by Christ—if not new and improved, then perhaps newly improved.

[JUNE 24]

God Is More

Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32;
2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41

GOD IS MORE than we can imagine. The story of Job builds to an epic climax in the whirlwind speech spanning chapters 38-41, including a brief response by Job (40:3-5) before God continues. Job has suffered incalculable losses, including his health, wealth, and the lives of his children, plus a lingering skin disease that disfigures his body. The prevailing theology of the day blamed him, saying that he got what he deserved. That is what Job's friends argue at him in repeating cycles throughout the book. They try to get Job to repent when he (and the reader) knows he is blameless. Ultimately, both the book of Job and the character Job reject and refute that specific theology, as does God who declares to Job's friends that they "have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (Job 42:7).

Throughout the book, Job proclaims his innocence loudly, hoping for a hearing from God. (The book is filled with legal terminology. Job wants to sue God whom he knows is ultimately responsible for his sorrow and fully aware of his innocence.) Before they can settle in or out of court, God makes sure Job knows just with whom he is dealing. In a rhetorical barrage of questions to which the answers are "you," "God," and "not me," God offers a résumé. These verses paint a portrait of God as Poet and Philosopher, Sovereign and Shepherd, Creator and Creatrix. God is more than Job or we can imagine.

God's "more" includes transcending our notions about gender. In one verse, God is a new mother providing boundaries for the sea she birthed out of her own womb (Job 38:8). In another, God is the father of the rain (Job 38:28), while in the very next verse God is the mother of ice and frost. In a world proscribed by binaries, including gender binaries, God is more. It is well past time that our language about God, in and out of church, reflects the plurality of the language in scripture. ■



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President for Life

CONGRATULATIONS to Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who just ordered new business cards. The ink was standard black, on white card stock, but it was the “president-for-life” after his name that made it special.

We wish Xi Jinping well in his future years of unquestioned authority, and expect he’ll soon be known simply as Xi, a name that will become synonymous with unlimited power, fearsome brutality, and a Facebook page that boasts 1.3 billion friends. (Note to Chinese citizens who think they might not friend him: Think again. Facebook has gone to a lot of trouble to make your personal information available to undemocratic regimes, and you can’t fight progress.)

Single-word names have long been associated with unwavering strength and power. China’s last president-for-life went by the name of Mao; Hannibal was one of the greatest generals in history; and



unchallenged. Despite their attempts at complete control of society—by monitoring communications, jailing opponents, controlling the media, and, in Xi’s case, looking disturbingly like a former newspaper editor I’d rather forget—dictators always overlook the most damaging weapon of all: humor.

Specifically, my humor, which I have wielded mercilessly over the past decades. In column after column for this magazine, I have taken on the world’s despots, skewering them with my caustic wit and bringing them to their knees. And to grateful citizens of their countries, I can only say: You’re welcome.

Dismantling maniacal regimes with mere words takes time, of course. Autocrats don’t give up at my first satirical mention of them, nor do they care that in doing so I have won numerous awards from press associations they’ve never heard of. (My 2003 Fourth Place in Christian Humor certificate shines like a beacon of accomplishment from its place of honor on our refrigerator door, despite being partly obscured by a shopping list, an expired coupon for soy milk, and an old “Family Circus” cartoon.)

But eventually, those tyrants collapsed in defeat, mere asterisks of history. Or, if you prefer, little frowny faces of history. The list is long:

■ Idi Amin ruled Uganda with an iron fist until I made fun of him. And what’s he doing now? Out of power, disgraced, and possibly dead. (I should check that.)

■ Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, who ruled for two generations, left office a defeated man a few months ago, having barely clung to power for 40 years after a column I wrote.

■ And China briefly moved to a more democratic form of government after I posthumously made fun of Mao’s skills at ping pong. (Although, I hear Xi is winning most of his games by default.)

NOR HAVE U.S. presidents escaped the lash of my wit. For several, I was the spark that set in motion the wheels of their demise. (And with that exquisite use of metaphor, who can be surprised?) For proof of my power, I need only point out that none of those presidents is still in office.

George W. Bush took the brunt of my satire, of course, and he has gone into virtual seclusion, reduced to clearing brush on his ranch and painting pictures of, among other subjects, poodles. I have seen some of these paintings. And I regret that.

Hillary Clinton didn’t even make it through the election after ... okay, never mind. (Still too soon?) But with Donald Trump, well, it’s only a matter of time. Specifically, when it’s “Mueller Time.”

Likewise, Vladimir Putin should be prepared for years of satirical abuse. I plan to be relentless with my comedic barbs, and start just as soon as I move to an undisclosed location with the federal witness protection program.

They taste your food first, right? ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners magazine.

And all the people said: Mao who?

Beyoncé makes you cancel singing lessons, because why bother? (Cancel those dance lessons, too.) But one-word names don’t always convey awesome power. People still tremble at the name of Genghis Khan. But Genghis? Not so much.

BEFORE THE Chinese president gets too full of himself, however, I’d like to point out that Xi looks like a Roman numeral with a typo, or a new Tesla model (which will be delayed another six months), or the latest version of Microsoft Office after all the bugs were fixed. (So embarrassing.)

And while I’m popping Xi’s balloon of unfetteredness, let me remind him of the ultimate weapon against dictators who mistakenly believe their rule will go



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